

109. Two five and tens sense stories

By Ron Klinger

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1NT ⁽¹⁾
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦ ⁽²⁾
Pass	?		

(1) 15-17 points

(2) No 4-card or 5-card major

What would you do as North with:

♠ 10985
♥ A82
♦ KJ532
♣ 10

Using a simple guide of High Card Points, you have 8 HCP and that warrants a 2NT rebid. If that is all you do in estimating your values, you will sometime be undervaluing your hand and not collecting the game or slam bonuses that are available.

For a start, a 5-card suit is often more valuable in no-trumps than a 4-card suit with the same strength. There can be good potential for an extra trick there. A-Q-J-x-x is preferable to A-Q-J-x. The presence or absence of tens should also be taken into account. K-Q-J-10 is superior to K-Q-J-4 and A-J-10-3 has a better chance of an extra trick than A-J-6-3.

Neither of these factors is taken into account using just High Card Points. Players themselves have to upgrade or downgrade. The HCP Count is A = 4, K = 3, Q = 2, J = 1. Using Banzai Points (BP) as described in *Better Balanced Bidding*, A = 5, K = 4, Q = 3, J = 2, 10 = 1 and add 2 points for a 5-card suit and 3 points for a 5-card that includes three or more honours.

There are 40 HCP in the pack and 60 BP. For every point range using HCP, add 50% to determine the BP range. Thus a 12-14 HCP 1NT = an 18-21 BP 1NT. A 15-17 HCP 1NT is played as a 22-25 1NT. That is not quite accurate since $15 + 50\% = 22.5$. That means if your BP total is below 22, you are definitely short of a 15-17 1NT.

Bidding 3NT with 25+ HCP = 37.5 BP. A total of 37 BP is borderline and a total of 38 makes it reasonable to bid 3NT. Not that it comes with guarantees, of course, but 38 BP means that your 3NT figures to have a better than 50% chance of success.

Applying this valuation to the hand above, it has 8 HCP and 13 BP. Add 2 points for the 5-card diamond suit and your BP total is 15. Opposite a 1NT opening with 22-25 BP, the lowest combined total is 37 and it might be more. Even if partner is near the bottom of the range and has 23 BPs, the combined total is 38 and you should be in 3NT.

In a game on BBO, with robots North-South, the auction went: 1NT : 2♣ : 2♦ : 2NT, all pass. The full deal is on the next page.

Bd. 22: Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 10985	
	♥ A82	
	♦ KJ532	
	♣ 10	
West		East
♠ A42		♠ K63
♥ J1076		♥ 953
♦ Q86		♦ 1097
♣ 962		♣ AK74
	South	
	♠ QJ7	
	♥ KQ4	
	♦ A4	
	♣ QJ853	

West led the ♥6. South won in hand with the ♥K and played the ♠Q, taken by East, who returned a heart. South won in dummy and played the ♠10 to the ♠A. West's ♥J was won by the ♥Q. South cashed the ♠J and played the ♣3 to the ♣10 and ♣K. East cashed the ♣A and South had nine tricks, +150. Note that the ♣10, even when singleton, was useful here.

When the deal arose in Session 6 of the 2020 English Bridge Union Olympiad Trials last March, the human Norths insisted on game. At one table it went Pass : 1♣, 1♠ : 1NT (15-17), 3NT, all pass. West led the ♥6, taken by the ace. The ♣10 won trick 2 and then declarer went about setting up the spades. When in with the ♠K, East cashed ♣A, ♣K and South had nine tricks, +600.

At the other table, the North-South bidding was Pass : 1NT, 2♣ : 2♦, 3NT, all pass. West led the ♥6. South won with the ♥Q and played the ♠7 to the ♠10 and ♠K. East returned the ♥5. South took the ♥K and played the ♠J, winning, followed by the ♦A and the ♦4 to the ♦J. South finished with nine tricks, +600, no swing.

Another point to note here is that when playing Imps and your side is vulnerable, bidding game becomes reasonable with 24+ HCP. It needs only a 40% chance to be a decent prospect. That means bidding 3NT with 36+ BPs is reasonable and with 37 BPs mandatory.

With neither side vulnerable, East deals and passes. What would you do as South with:

♠ 10532
♥ A84
♦ A10
♣ AK64

The other side of the coin if you use BPs for balanced hands is that you should have at least 22 BPs for a 15-17 1NT opening. Remember that $15 + 50\% = 22.5$, so opening 1NT with 22 BPs already includes a slight upgrade.

This hand has 21 BPs (three aces $\times 5 = 15$, one king = 4 and two tens = 2). That makes it underweight for a 1NT opening. As your side is not vulnerable, there is no strong case to upgrade. Open 1♣ and treat it as a minimum balanced hand.

This was Board 30 from the same match:

Dealer East : Nil vulnerable

	North	
	♠ A9	
	♥ 1095	
	♦ K8752	
	♣ J85	
West		East
♠ KQJ876		♠ 4
♥ Q6		♥ KJ732
♦ 3		♦ QJ964
♣ Q1097		♣ 32
	South	
	♠ 10532	
	♥ A84	
	♦ A10	
	♣ AK64	

On BBO with robots East-West, it went:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♣ ⁽¹⁾
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

(1) Downgrading the hand to below a 1NT opening

North led the ♣5. South won with the ♣K and shifted to the ♠3, king, ace. Declarer lost 2 spades, a heart, a diamond and 2 clubs, one off, North-South +50.

In the EBU Trials:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1NT
2♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

North led the ♦2, queen, ace. South switched to the ♠2, king, ace. North returned the ♥10: two – four – queen. West cashed ♠Q, ♠J, North pitching ♥9. West exited with the ♥6: five – king – ace. South cashed the ♠10 and played the ♦10: ♣7 – ♦K – ♦4. Declarer still had two clubs to lose, two off, North-South +100.

At the other table:

West	North	East	South
		2♥ ⁽¹⁾	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

(1) Hearts and a minor

West led the ♠K, taken by the ace. Declarer played to the ♦A and back to the ♦K. After ♥5: two – eight – queen, West cashed the ♠Q, ♠J and exited with the ♠8. Declarer made 2 spades, a heart, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs, two down, –100 and –4 Imps.

If East passes and West does not bid, it would probably go 1♣ : 1♦, 1NT, all pass. That is the limit of the North-South hands. If South opens a 15-17 1NT, or 22-25 BPs, North is worth 14 BPs, enough to invite game. Now North-South are headed into minus territory, probably ending in 2NT.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. South dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1♦ ⁽¹⁾
Dble	3♦ ⁽²⁾	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Dble	All Pass

(1) 3+ diamonds

(2) Natural, game invitational

What would you lead as West from:

♠ K963
♥ AQ75
♦ 10
♣ K875

2. With neither side vulnerable there are two passes to you. What do you do with:

♠ KJ543
♥ A10
♦ 105
♣ J854

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

*Sitting at the bar in the kitchen at night. Tried to pick up my wife. She gave me a fake phone number.
WTH...*