

375. Value assessment

By Ron Klinger

When we started to learn bridge, whether from books or from bridge teachers, our initial assessment of hand values was based on HCP. As we played and played, we found that there were other factors that would influence our decisions on whether we had a good 12-count or a poor 12-count.

The presence of tens in the hand can be beneficial. With K-Q-10 opposite A-6-5, the ten adds no significant value to the hand, but K-Q-10-3 opposite A-6-5 is much better than K-Q-4-3 opposite A-6-5. With the latter holding, the chance of 4 tricks is a 3-3 break (36%). With the former combination, the chance of 4 tricks climbs to over 50%. The jack could be singleton or doubleton or when you play king and ace, if the player sitting over the K-Q-10-3 shows out, you know to finesse the ten. To include tens in hand assessment, some players add half a point for each ten.

Similarly K-Q-J-10 opposite a singleton can make three tricks, but K-Q-J-4 opposite a low singleton is almost always only two tricks. Tens can be particularly useful when combined with higher honours. Thus K-J-10 opposite 6-5-2 will always produce one trick and has a 50% chance of two tricks, while K-J-4 opposite 6-5-2 has only a 25% chance of two tricks and a 25% chance of no tricks.

Holding a 5-card suit is also worth an upgrade. Clearly, K-Q-4-3-2 opposite A-6-5 is better than K-Q-4-3 opposite A-6-5. The former has a 68% chance of five tricks (3-2 split) and a 96% chance of 4 tricks. The latter has only a 36% chance of 4 tricks. The odds improve if you include a ten, such as K-Q-10-4-3 opposite A-6-5. Now you make 5 tricks when the suit is 3-2 (68%) and also when the suit is 4-1 and the jack is singleton (5.5%) or if J-x-x-x is on the right of the 5-card holding (12%). When you play king then ace and LHO shows out, you know what to do. That brings the total chance of 5 tricks to better than 85%.

If you use only HCP, you will underestimate the value of your hand and sometimes by a significant margin. This was yesterday's question:

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

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

(1) Simple Stayman

(2) No 4+ major

What would you do as South with:

♠ AJ3
♥ K2
♦ KQ1062
♣ Q104

Superficially, the 1NT opener has 15 HCP, a minimum, and would pass 1NT. If you consider other factors, then you can upgrade the hand into accepting the invitation. Clearly the South hand is better than if it were:

♠ A103
♥ K72
♦ A104
♣ A983

The question is, how much better? A good approach is to add one point for a 5-card suit in a balanced hand and 1½ – 2 points if the 5-card is strong. What qualifies as a strong 5-card suit? One that contains three or more honours. If you adjust for the two tens and the 5-card suit, there is a good case for raising 2NT to 3NT. Of course, no one is promising you eternal happiness if you do raise to 3NT. What you need is an understanding partner if 3NT does not succeed.

One deal proves nothing but this was the actual deal from a club pairs duplicate:

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

North	
♠ 65	
♥ J987	
♦ A84	
♣ A986	
West	East
♠ KQ4	♠ 109872
♥ Q63	♥ A1054
♦ J97	♦ 53
♣ J753	♣ K2
South	
♠ AJ3	
♥ K2	
♦ KQ1062	
♣ Q104	

The layout was friendly for South in no-trumps. On another day, the spade position could be fragile. No pair bid to 3NT. That is forgivable at pairs, but you would have scored a top board by reaching 3NT. At teams, where bidding vulnerable games is profitable even if the chance of success is only 40% or better, you should definitely be in game

The results were 1NT +90, 14%. It is not easy to see how South would make only seven tricks. The lead was the ♠K. If South ducks (Bath Coup), only a diamond switch does not give South an extra trick. Even on a diamond shift, there are good prospects for overtricks. Making 8 tricks in 1NT, +120, also on the ♠K lead was worth 28%. One pair played in 3♦, making 9 tricks, +110 and 22%. The next group were in 1NT or 2NT on the ♣3 lead, low, king, and unblocking the ♣10 would be a good move. The results were 9 tricks, +150 and 56%, 10 tricks, +180 and 77%, while one made 11 tricks, +210 for 100%.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer South : Nil vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1♥ – 5+ hearts
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ AQ102
♥ 9843
♦ A874
♣ 2

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

I removed all the fattening food in the house. It was delicious.