Adventures in Bridge
Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education
www.advinbridge.com
info@advinbridge.com ♠ 850 570 6459

Hand Evaluation and Re-Evaluation

© AiB

Robert S. Todd
robert@advinbridge.com

A History of Hand Evaluation Concepts

Before 1930s

Culberson Points were used to decide if we opened the bidding – commonly called "Quick Tricks" in the modern game. 2.5 Quick Tricks made for an opening bid.

1930s

Two ideas were developed that made a big jump forward in hand evaluation.

- *High Card Points (HCP)* – for balanced hands
  - *HCP were invented and systematically studied by Milton Work. Work determined that these points were only effective for balanced hand evaluation.*
- *Losing Trick Count (LTC)* – for unbalanced hands
  - *LTC was first published by the French, but the concept was understood by many of the experts of the day.*

1950s

Goren popularized HCP to the masses. He added the idea of shortness points (Void =3, Singleton = 2, Doubleton = 1) to HCP and developed the Goren System of 13+ points to open the bidding.
Note: Goren either ignored or just accepted for simplicity's sake that HCP were only effective for balanced hands. Goren attempted to use his "shortness adjustment" to apply these points to all hand types.

1970s-1990s

Players began to realize that Goren's method of hand evaluation was flawed. They moved away from the idea of Goren points to a method that was more effective for evaluating hands for both suit contracts and notrump contracts.

Opening Bids
HCP plus Length Points (1 point for *decent* 5-card suit, 2 points for *decent* 6-card suit, etc.) makes for *Total Points*. With these new hand evaluation techniques players began to open the bidding with 12 total points.

After Finding a Fit
The idea of shortness points was not to be completely discarded. It was wisely determined that these "ruffing values" are only effective after we have found a "fit" and have decided that we are likely to play in a suit contract (we can't ruff anything in 3NT!) So shortness points are added only after the bidding has progressed and our side knows we are going to play in a suit contract – *Majors more common than minors.*
Additionally, it was determined that shortness points are most effective when held in the hand with "short trump" – since length points have already been given to the hand with long trump.

Modern Approach

- Balanced Hands - A modern expert player will open almost all balanced 12 HCP.
- Unbalanced Hands - Modern experts open shapely hands even more aggressively than 20 years ago. Most players use their judgment about which 10-11 HCP hands to open, but a useful tool can be Losing Trick Count (LTC). Most unbalanced hands with 10-11 HCP that have 7 or fewer losers should be treated as opening bids. LTC is more effective after a fit is found and we know we are going to play in a suit contract. Consider Losers and Covers.

Note – This is 10-11 HCP, not upgraded points. The Losing Trick Count takes the place of length points and other upgrades we might make to our hand.

Other Ideas Related to Hand Evaluation

- *Rule of 20* - A simplified version of Losing Trick Count.
- *Rule of 15* – to help determine when to open in the 4th seat.
- *Upgrades and Downgrades* – location of honors, hand type, etc.
- *Law of Total Tricks* – the size of our fit is very important.

Hand Re-Evaluation

Evaluating our hand starts with our own cards, but then it progresses to what we know about partner's cards and then the opponents' hands as well.

Partner's Hand

There are many points during the auction when we can re-evaluate our hand based on what partner does. Here is a brief list of some of the most common ways:

- Holdings in Partner's Primary suit
  - Downgrade with shortness
  - Upgrade with fitting cards
- Double Fits
- Extra Large Fits – Wasted Queen for 5-5 Fits.
- Location of Other Honors
  - Honors in suits that we think will help partner
  - No honors opposite partner's shortness
- Offensively vs. Defensively Oriented Hands – based on partner's suits.

Opponents' Hands

The opponents will also give us information that helps us re-evaluate our hand.

- Positional Values – both upgrades and downgrades (Well-positioned AQ becomes AK).
- Types of HCP
  - Controls in the opponents' suit
  - Slow tricks in our long suits
  - Ruffing values
- Offensively vs. Defensively-Oriented Hands – based on opponents' suit
- Notrump vs. Suit-Oriented Cards