

Counting Shape – II

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Defense & Declarer Play Level: BASIC & Intermediate

Tuesday Night Lecture Series

- **Stop**

- **Look**

- **Listen**

- **Analyze**

- **Plan**

- **Execute**

In Counting Shape I & II we reviewed how opponent's bidding describes shape and how we begin to build shape estimates. Assume a 2/1 Game Force approach – the more common duplicate system. Use the bidding to create an approximate picture of the hands you don't see.

How do we count SHAPE?

1. Bidding
2. Opening leads/New Suit leads
3. Information from Dummy
4. Count Signals
5. The play of the hand (Discovery)

Let's look at a few examples how can counting shape comes in handy. Here's a close game that many would miss. 23 HCP

between the hands, but all are working. The key idea is that LHO has revealed great distribution (5-5 in the minor suits) and provided an extra

You	Partner	You	LHO	Partner	RHO
♠K10432	♠AJ86	1♠	2N ¹	3♣ ²	3♦
♥AK102	♥QJ65	3♥ ³	Pass	4♥	All Pass
♦9	♦642	1 = Unusual NT (Both Minors)			
♣J82	♣K3	2 = Unusual/Unusual – ♠ Limit Raise or better			
		3 = Source of Tricks, inviting game.			

chance for you to make 10 tricks. ♠s might split 2-2 with LHO holding the ♠Q. LHO has only 3 spaces to hold ♠s. We expect RHO to have 4♦s and 3♣s, therefore 6 spaces to hold ♠s. The point here is tackling ♠s should be done by leading small from hand toward Dummy, then finessing RHO for the ♠Q. Notice if ♠s are 1=4 you can pick up the entire suit without a loss. All because you were counting...

Partner	You	LHO	Partner	RHO	You
♠KQ1032	♠A9	Pass	1♠	2♠ ¹	2N
♥52	♥KQ3	Pass	3N	Pass	Pass
♦AJ63	♦Q1042	Pass			
♣K2	♣Q1054	1 = Michaels Cue Bid 5♥s & minor			

2-suited overcalls often give away the keys to the contract – that's why many experts use them only when they are likely to own the contract (preferably in one of

overcaller's suits). A ♥ lead drives out RHO's ♥A and you win the 2nd ♥ in hand. You have 6 winners and need 3 more. RHO signaled an odd number of ♥s (Count signals on the 2nd trick; attitude signals on the 1st trick). It's likely RHO's minor suit is ♣s, but there's no harm checking. If it's ♦s, then LHO will be void. If LHO is void RHO will be end-played. If LHO follows, then RHO has 5♣s and only 3 cards in ♠&♦. Therefore a ♦ finesse is right – immediately. When the ♦ finesse holds, you can return to hand with the ♠A to repeat the ♦ finesse. If this 2nd ♦ finesse holds and ♦s are 3-2, Cash the ♦A and return to the ♦10 in hand to finesse the ♠J. If ♦s are 4-1, then finesse the ♠J immediately and cash ♠s then ♦s. You count so beautifully.

Sometimes an aggressive but innocent take out double paints the road to success for a thin slam. Partner liked the hand s/he was dealt. You have a ♣ loser, a possible ♦ loser, and must find the ♠Q. You have to decide which of 2 patterns LHO holds: 1=4=4=4 or 2=4=3=4. There are only 12 HCP for opponents to hold, and LHO must hold at least 10 of them. A takeout double with only 10 or 11 HCP is based on perfect 1444 shape. LHO could hold the 1=4=4=4 hand without the ♠Q: ♠xx, ♥QJxx, ♦Kxxx, ♣Axxx; but could hold the ♠Q with the less perfect 2=4=3=4 shape:

Partner	You	LHO	Partner	RHO	You
♠KJ1032	♠A975	Pass	1♠	Dbl	2N ¹
♥A2	♥K763	Pass	3♠ ²	Pass	3N
♦AQ63	♦J104	Pass	4♦ ³	Pass	4♥ ³
♣K2	♣QJ9	Pass	4N	Pass	5♣ ⁴
Unfavorable vulnerability		1 = Jordan Balanced Invitation + 2 = Extras 3= Control 4=1 or 4 Keys			

♠Qx, ♥QJxx, ♦Kxx, ♣Axxx. For LHO to hold ♠Qxx they would play off-shape takeout doubles **ASK**. Before you go racing off to finesse RHO for the ♠Q, take a minute to see if a discovery play might help. ♥s are 4=3 so try ruffing the 3rd round of ♥s to see if

RHO holds the ♥J. If RHO holds the ♥J or ♥Q, then the ♠Q should be with LHO and you can arrange to finesse it if it doesn't show on LHO's 2nd ♠. Few make a takeout double on 9 HCP 1=4=4=4 and survive.

If the ♥J/Q doesn't fall, you still have to decide how to tackle ♠s. Good luck!! (Yes, sadly, sometimes after all the counting is done, you still have to take a chance. At least your chance is well informed. In matchpoints you might play with the field – make the play most likely made by others in this contract. In teams you might choose to play RHO for ♠Qxx and finesse the 2nd round – particularly if you need a swing? *Tempting...*)

“Eight Ever, Nine Never” is an adage about finessing the trump Queen when no other information is available about the hand. However when opponents overcall, they give you information that changes your choice. You can count 10 tricks, but this is MP Pairs so overtricks are important. Do you finesse trumps or not? Play the ♥A. Both follow. Counting tells you LHO has 7 cards that aren't ♦s and RHO has 10 cards that aren't ♦s. That means that RHO is 10/17 (or 59%) favorite to hold the ♥Q. Take the finesse!...and ring up a top board. See the full discussion of Open Spaces and split probabilities on this hand at: <http://www.cincybridge.com/Lessons/Finessing%20with%209%20Trumps.pdf>

W Deals	♠ 10		
None Vul	♥ AKJ982		
	♦ J3		
	♣ KQJ10		
♠ Q98754	N	♠ AJ6	
♥ Q105	W 24 E	♥ 6	
♦ 107	S	♦ KQ962	
♣ 98		♣ 7532	
	♠ K32	<i>Deep Finesse:</i>	
	♥ 743	NS 5♣, 5♥	
	♦ A854	5N	
	♣ A64		

Learning Points

- 1) Counting shape helps when declaring and defending. Shape can help when HCP can't.
- 2) Counting distribution and HCP together is a powerful in guide to the best choice of plays.
- 3) Never take practice finesses (finesses that are unnecessary but available). Avoid or delay pure guess finesses whenever possible! Count instead.
- 4) Sometimes after due diligence you are left with an informed guess. Don't despair – make a good choice and accept the consequences.

RHO	You	LHO	Dummy
Pass	1♥	2♦	3♦
Pass	4♥	All Pass	
East leads ♦K			

Good Books

Edwin Kantar, [Advanced Bridge Defense](#) Marty Bergen, [More Points Schmoints](#)
Mike Lawrence, [How to Read Your Opponent's Cards: The Bridge Experts' Way to Locate Missing High Cards](#)
Eric Jannersten, [Card Reading: The Art of Guessing Right at the Bridge Table](#)
Marshall Miles, [Inferences at Bridge](#)
Keywords: HCP, Shape, Tricks, Planning the Play.