

♠♥♦♣ Learning Points – Competitive Bidding What’s 10 HCP Worth?

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Bidding Level: Basic

Tuesday Night Lecture Series

Competitive bidding tools are outlined on the left or back of your convention card. Convention cards are only the tip of the iceberg. They don’t tell you **How, When, Where and Why** to compete. We want **best practice**. Before we begin:

- 1) About 50% of all hands involve competitive bidding. We can improve 50% of our game!
- 2) Competitive bidding aims at a better result – so the scoring method matters – MPs are different than IMPs. In pairs the score is based on the number of pairs we beat or tie. Predicting this is difficult. In IMPs, the score is from a payoff table that defines odds we need for risky actions.
- 3) Getting the best score means choosing the best strain and level for our side. In addition we want to eliminate information exchanges between our opponents. We need accurate hand evaluation and to predict the number of tricks both sides can win. The good news is what we learn here will apply to our constructive auctions.
- 4) Competitive bidding has 3 objectives. If you are not meeting one of these, do not bid. *Notice carefully: telling partner our HCP is NOT shown.*
- 5) There are 2 competitive bidding contexts: a) We open the bidding and they intrude, or b) They open the bidding and we intrude.

Learning plan:

- Hand Evaluation: HCP & shape → tricks
- Estimate tricks available for both sides.
- Estimate our tricks.
- **Competitive bidding challenge: What’s 10 HCP worth?**
- The 2 Competitive Auctions.
- Best Competitive bidding practices.
- Review Key Bidding tools.

Competitive Bidding Objectives:

- 1) Find our fit (explore strain and level)
- 2) Interfere with opponents’ bidding – obstruct or preempt.
- 3) Suggest a defense

HCP are useful – they are like the keys to your car – great for getting started but you don’t touch them much while you’re driving. Indeed HCP help in the 1st 2 rounds of bidding, but are less useful the more distribution you encounter. HCP predict the right level for two balanced hands approaching a NT contract. For trump contracts we need a better method. For now we will discuss a dozen challenging bidding problems with a common theme.

Consider the following auction. You have 10 HCP in each hand, one of each honor. If you get the sense that not all 10 HCP hands are the same, you’re on your way. Not all 10 HCP hands are invitational. To quote Sean Connery in his Oscar Winning role (beat cop Jim Malone in “The Untouchables” 1987) **“What are you prepared to do?”**

Assume you and partner play Negative Doubles and Strong Freebids. Say RHO holds 7 ♥s for the 3-level preempt. This won’t always be the case but it’s a good place to start. Consider what action you would take with each hand. (Each has 10 HCP: 1-A, 1-K, 1-Q, and 1-J):

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♠	3♥	????	

Hands	Your Bid	Hands	Your Bid
♠Kxx ♥Axx ♦Qxx ♣Jxxx		♠AKxx ♥Qx ♦Jxxx ♣xxx	
♠KJxx ♥xx ♦AQxx ♣xxx		♠KJxx ♥x ♦AQxxxx ♣xx	
♠xxx ♥QJ ♦xxxxxx ♣AK		♠Kxxxx ♥x ♦AQJxxx ♣x	
♠Kxxx ♥Axxx ♦Qx ♣Jxx		♠Jxxx ♥AKx ♦Qxxx ♣xx	
♠KJxx ♥x ♦AQxxx ♣xxx		♠KJx ♥xx ♦xxxxxx ♣AQ	
♠AKxx ♥xxx ♦Qx ♣Jxxx		♠Kxxxx ♥- ♦AQJxxxx ♣x	

By the way – sound reasoning is more important than getting the right answer....

(Hint: Law of Total Tricks: Count your side’s trumps. Count their trumps. Estimate their trumps by splitting the remaining cards evenly between partner and LHO. Their Trumps + Our Trumps = Their Tricks + Our Tricks. Losing Trick Count: Give partner 7 or fewer losers (opening bid). Count your losers and deduct sum from 24 to get your side’s expected winners. Total Tricks – Our LTC Winners = Their Winners).

1♠-3♥-???	Our Trumps	Their Trumps	Total Tricks	Our LTC Losers	Our LTC Winners	Their Winners	Comments
Vulnerable vs. NV opponents ♠Kxx ♥Axx ♦Qxx ♣Jxxx	8	8-9	16-17	7+ (9-10) = 16-17	7-8	8-10	~16 Total Tricks. We rate 7-8 tricks. They will take 8-10. Pass. Leave the 16-17 trick hands to the opponents at unfavorable vulnerability.
♠KJxx ♥xx ♦AQxx ♣xxx	9	9	18	7+8	9	9	~18 Total Tricks. We can manage ~9. They can manage ~9. Compete to 3♠.
♠xxx ♥QJ ♦xxxxxx ♣AK	8	8-9	16-17	7+8	9	7-8	Our ♥ values are not working. Opponents have these 3 HCP in other suits. ♣AK not developing tricks in our long suits. 3 small trump + 8 card fit → 16 losers and 8 winners, not 9. Pass.
♠Kxxx ♥Axxx ♦Qx ♣Jxx	9	8	17	7+9	8	9	~17 Total Tricks. We rate 8 tricks!!! Pass before you think your hand is better than it is. The ♦Q and ♣J are not working.
♠KJxx ♥x ♦AQxxx ♣xxx	9	9-10	18-19	7+7	10	8-9	~18-19 Total Tricks. We rate 10 tricks. Start with a Cuebid (game force & good trumps). If partner has 5 losers slam is possible. A jump to 4♠ here is not encouraging. Note they have a sound sacrifice.
♠AKxx ♥xxx ♦Qx ♣Jxxx	9	8-9	17-18	7+9	8	9-10	17-18 Total Tricks. We rate to take 8. Many will be in love with their ♠s. If partner has 2 or 3 ♥s, we might lose 2-3 top ♥ tricks in a ♠ contract. The ♦Q and ♣J are not working. Opponents rate to have a game chance.
♠AKxx ♥Qx ♦Jxxx ♣xxx	9	9	18	7+9	8	10	The ♥Q is likely worthless. Pass firmly. If partner reopens, settle at 3♠. They rate to make game. Don't push them there.
♠KJxx ♥x ♦AQxxxx ♣xx	9	9-10	18-19	7+6	11	7-8	~18-19 Total Tricks. We rate ~11 tricks. Cuebid 4♥ then bid 5♦ over partner's 4♠ rebid. Partner's ♠AQ, ♦K, and ♣A is enough for slam. So is ♠AQ, ♦K ♣K and ♥A. Partner will bid 6 if s/he has either holding. Grand slam if partner has 5 losers.
♠Kxxxx ♥x ♦AQJxxx ♣x	10	9-10	19-20	7+5	12	7-8	~19-20 Total Tricks - wild results possible. We rate 12 tricks or more – check on Key cards and bid accordingly. If we make slam they have a worthwhile sacrifice.
♠Jxxx ♥AKx ♦Qxxx ♣xx	9	8-9	17-18	7+ 8-9 = 15-16	8-9	8-10	~17-18 Total Tricks. We rate 8-9 tricks. The ♥AK is an alarm bell . Opponents do not have these cards so they have 7 HCP we need in our suit or side suits. Better to defend. Pass. If partner reopens with a double, pass for penalties.
♠KJx ♥xx ♦xxxxxx ♣AQ	8	8-9	16-17	7+8	9	7-8	~17 Total Tricks. We rate 9 winners. Bid 3♠. Partner will bid on with 6 losers or fewer.
♠Kxxxx ♥- ♦AQJxxx ♣x	10	10	20	7+4	13	7	~20 Total Tricks. We can make a grand slam if partner holds the ♠A and the ♣A. Either the ♦K or a ♦ singleton will work. Note any holding requiring the ♦ finesse means we should stay in 6♠. LHO is likely to hold the ♦K.

During the auction focus on your trump fit and their trump fit. Estimate Total Tricks. Count your losers and estimate partner's. Know how many tricks opponents rate to take. Be aggressive at favorable vulnerability and conservative at unfavorable vulnerability. Remember, LTC and LoTT assume even suit breaks and at least half of your finesses work. Devalue hands where these assumptions are unlikely.

References: [Matchpoints](#) by Kit Woolsey; "Inside Out Evaluation" by Jeff Rubens; [Modern Losing Trick Count Bidding to Win at Bridge](#) by Ron Klinger; [To Bid or Not to Bid the Law of Total Tricks](#) by Larry Cohen; [I Fought the Law of Total Tricks](#) by Mike Lawrence and Anders Wirgren; [Hand Evaluation Points Schmoints Guaranteed to Make You a Better Bidder](#) by Marty Bergen