



Play & Learn

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Judgment and limit raises

We've been discussing responder's limit raise of a major-suit opening bid.

A major-suit limit raise shows a fit and a good 10–12 points. Pairs who appreciate the value of a bigger than eight-card fit agree that an immediate limit raise to three of opener's major promises four-card support. With only three-card support and limit-raise strength, these players make a two-step raise by making some forcing bid first. With 6–10 points and three or more cards in opener's major, responder can make a single raise to the two level. The overlap in the ranges for a single raise and a limit raise may bother some readers. A good 10-point hand can be boosted up to a medium limit raise.

Consider two very similar 10-point responding hands, both with four-card support. As responder, how high will you raise with each hand after partner's 1♥ opening bid is passed to you?

- ① ♠ 6 4 ♥ Q 7 4 3 ♦ K 8 3 ♣ A 7 5 2
 ② ♠ J 6 4 ♥ Q 7 4 3 ♦ K 8 3 ♣ A 7 5

Did you have a hard time deciding? Let's put these two hands in similar complete deals. In both, West leads the ♣K against South's heart contract.

Deal 1

Dlr: South
 Vul: Both

♠ Q 10 5	♠ 6 4	♠ K J 9 2
♥ 9 8 2	♥ Q 7 4 3	♥ 10
♦ 10 7 6	♦ K 8 3	♦ A J 9 5 2
♣ K Q J 9	♣ A 7 5 2	♣ 10 8 4

♠ A 8 7 3	♠ A 8 7 3
♥ A K J 6 5	♥ A K J 6 5
♦ Q 4	♦ Q 4
♣ 6 3	♣ 6 3

South's losers are one club, one diamond and three spades. North's 10th point came from the doubleton spade. Declarer can make 4♥ by losing a spade early and using two high trumps as entries to ruff two spade losers in dummy (the last one high).

Deal 2

Dlr: South
 Vul: Both

♠ Q 10 5	♠ J 6 4	♠ K 9 2
♥ 9 8 2	♥ Q 7 4 3	♥ 10
♦ 10 7 6	♦ K 8 3	♦ A J 9 5 2
♣ K Q J 9	♣ A 7 5	♣ 10 8 4 2

♠ A 8 7 3	♠ A 8 7 3
♥ A K J 6 5	♥ A K J 6 5
♦ Q 4	♦ Q 4
♣ 6 3	♣ 6 3

The only change we made was to trade East's ♠J for North's ♣2. Now North's 10 points all come from high cards. Declarer's losers are still one club, one diamond and three spades, but now there's no way to eliminate more than one spade loser, and declarer will make only 3♥. The key to reaching game on Deal 1 and stopping in partscore on Deal 2 is recognizing that North's hand in Deal 2 isn't quite as good as North's hand in Deal 1. Some might say that the Deal 2 hands don't fit as well; some might say a jack is overvalued at one point; many would say that North's 4–3–3–3 distribution offers fewer options in the play than a less balanced hand. All true, but there is a tool that takes all this into account and could have told North to raise to 3♥ on Deal 1 but only to 2♥ on Deal 2. That tool is Losing Trick Count, or LTC, and it is used to help you evaluate your hand once a fit is found.

Unfortunately, I always want to tell you more than my allotted space permits, so tune in next month for an introduction to LTC. If you can't wait, you can access Jennifer Jones's series of articles on LTC that ran from December 2011 through May 2012 by going to acbl.org and using your ACBL member number to log into MyACBL to access previous issues of the Bridge Bulletin. I've posted more details on how to navigate all this on the articles page of my website, PatH2Bridge.com.

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