

122. Losers don't count losers

By Ron Klinger

Dealer South : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1♠
2♣	3♣ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	?

(1) 10+ points, 3+ spades, limit raise or stronger in spades

What would you do as South with:

♠ QJ1053
♥ AQ
♦ KJ5
♣ 986

The deal arose in a game on BBO against robots.

Dealer South : North-South vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 876	
	♥ K64	
	♦ AQ974	
	♣ Q7	
West		East
♠ K94		♠ A2
♥ J73		♥ 109852
♦ 82		♦ 1063
♣ AK532		♣ J104
	South	
	♠ QJ1053	
	♥ AQ	
	♦ KJ5	
	♣ 986	

With humans North-South, robots East-West, South bid 3♣ after the auction above, all pass. West cashed ♠A, ♠K and played a third club, ruffed. Declarer lost two spade tricks, but made nine tricks, +140.

At one table in an international match, South passed, North opened 1♦, South bid 1♠, all pass, North-South +140. How do you account for that? It is highly likely that South's ♥A or ♦K was stuck behind some other card(s) and South thought he had only 9 or 10 points.

At the other table, South 1♠, North 1NT (forcing), South 2♣ : North 3♠ (limit raise), South 4♣, all pass. Declarer lost the same four tricks, one off, -100 and -6 Imps.

A game invitational hand of about 10-12 points has 8 losers. The South hand has 7½ losers. $8 + 7\frac{1}{2} = 15\frac{1}{2}$ and $24 - 15\frac{1}{2} = 8\frac{1}{2}$. That means the expectation for North-South in a spade contract is 8 or 9 tricks. For details of the Losing Trick Count methods for hand evaluation when a trump fit exists, see [The Modern Losing Trick Count](#). Had South focused on counting losers instead of points, South would have known to pass 3♣.

Incidentally, note West's disciplined pass over 1♠. West has enough strength for a 2♣ overcall, but the quality of the club suit is inadequate. For a 2♣ overcall, with adequate strength, the number of clubs plus the honours in the club suit should come to 8 or more (same as the number of tricks for which you are bidding). See [Guide To Better Bridge](#) for more on the Suit Quality Test for overcalls.

Dealer South : Nil vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♥	Pass	1♥
			?

What would you do as South with:

♠ K10
♥ A98752
♦ A
♣ K976

Just as some players bid too much, others do not bid enough. South has 5 losers. For the raise to 2♥, about 6-9 points, North usually has a 9-loser hand, occasionally 8 losers. $5 + 9 = 14$ and $24 - 14 = 10$ tricks are probable. If North has 8 losers, then 11 tricks are expected.

Another way to look at it is this: The pack has 40 HCP. There are 13 tricks per deal. Each trick is therefore worth 3 points plus a tiny bit (40 divided by 13). Partner's 2♥ raise of 6-9 points will usually have two winners, sometimes three. If you have 5 losers and partner brings you two winners, you are down to three losers and ten tricks. That means South is worth a 4♥ bid here.

Some have a natural aptitude for hand valuation. For those of us who do not, the Losing Trick Count for trump contracts is a very useful guide as to the number of tricks expected.

Dealer South : Nil vulnerable

	North	
	♠ QJ62	
	♥ KJ104	
	♦ 1062	
	♣ J2	
West		East
♠ A54		♠ 9873
♥ Q6		♥ 3
♦ Q8543		♦ KJ97
♣ Q105		♣ A843
	South	
	♠ K10	
	♥ A98752	
	♦ A	
	♣ K976	

At the table, with robots North-South, humans East-West, robot South passed 2♥. West, unaware of the lurking danger, doubled for takeout. North bid 3♥ and South still passed. West also passed and led the ♦4. With the ♣A onside, declarer made 11 tricks, +200. In the same international match, both sides were in 4♥, +450, no swing. One North-South pair bid 1♥ : 2♥, 4♥; the other bid 1♥ : 3♥, 4♥.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

North
♠ 106
♥ AK75
♦ K9743
♣ K4

South
♠ Q53
♥ Q9843
♦ AQJ
♣ Q2

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	2♣	2♥
3♣	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♣5: king – ace – two. East is not fooled by the ♣K play and East switches to the ♠8: three – ace – six. West returns the ♠2: ten – king – five. East plays the ♣6 at trick 4: queen – jack – four. Plan the play

2. Dealer South : Nil vulnerable

North
♠ A76
♥ A53
♦ KQJ10
♣ AK4

South
♠ KQ2
♥ K987
♦ A3
♣ 9876

West	North	East	South
			1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	1NT
Pass	6NT	All Pass	

West leads the ♠J. Plan the play.

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

I like cats too. Let's exchange recipes.