

QUESTION FROM A STUDENT:

Hi Barbara, hope you are well. Quick question:

Question: My partner opened a minor and if I am the responder with 6-9 points and and I bid 1H or 1S, how does my partner know if I have 4 or 5 of the major?

Answer: She doesn't. You could have 4 or 5 or 6 or 7.
Your later bid(s) can give partner more information.

Q: But, with 6-9 points, responder can only bid once?

A: With 6-9 pts...if opener offers you a choice of suits, you must pick one of hers.

e.g.

1H – 1S
2C – ?
And you have

S A5432
H 92
D K432
C 109

1H – 1S
2C – 2H choose hearts cuz you know she has five hearts and may only have four clubs.

But if you have

S A5432
H 9
D K432
C 1092

1H – 1S
2C – Pass because you prefer clubs to hearts.

BUT if you have

S A65432
H 9
D K432
C 109

1H – 1S
2C – 2S because you hate both her suits and have a 6-card spade suit. This shows 6-9 pts and usually six Spades or five excellent ones.

TIP FROM TONY (JACKSON)

Quickie about Roman Keycard Blackwood: 1430:

If you play "1430", when your partner asks you for keycards and you have 4, you will respond "5 clubs". (showing 1 or 4 keycards). If partner now signs off in 5 of the agreed trump suit, you need to jump to slam to show you have 4 keycards and not only one keycard:

1S - 2D

2NT - 3S

4NT - 5C

5S - 6S

When your partner bid 4NT, they were asking for keycards, and your 5C bid said "1 or 4". When they signoff in 5 spades, they are saying "if you only have 1, we don't have slam." Since you have 4, you need to bid slam yourself.

By the way, this also applies to the "3 or 0" response. If your partner asks for keycards and you have 3, and therefore respond "5 diamonds", if your partner signs off in 5 of your suit, you should jump to slam.

Question from K.

a) Assuming that you are playing Unusual 2NT in the direct seat, (1H - 2NT) what is the meaning of a 2NT overcall (of opp's 1-level suit) in the balancing seat? 1H - Pass - Pass - 2NT.

b) Assuming standard preemptive (jump) overcalls in the direct seat, what is the meaning of a jump overcall in the balancing seat? Does the meaning differ if it's a 2- or 3-level overcall?

ANSWERS FROM ALEX:

a) In the balancing seat, (or pass-out seat) 1NT shows 11-14 HCP, a flat hand and a stopper in the opponents' suit.

In the balancing seat, A double followed by the cheapest NT bid shows 15-18 balanced hand with a stopper in opponents' suit.

In the balancing seat, a jump to 2NT shows 19-21 balanced. That is what most people agree on.

e.g. 1H - P - P - 2NT

b) In the balancing (or pass-out) seat, a jump to the 2 or 3 level (depending on which suit opponents opened) generally shows a good 6-card suit and 13-15 points.

Meaning of a double jump (1D-P-P-3S) has to be discussed with partner. It should be something like 13-15 points and a 7- card suit.

One level overcalls in immediate seat could be as weak as

S KQ10xx

H xx

D Qxxx

C xx

In balancing seat, the less you have, the more you know must be in partner's hand, and you must strive to keep the bidding open unless you see LHO still counting points on his fingers and toes.

In balancing seat, if the bidding goes

1H - P - P to you and you have

S J7643

H 76

D K76

C Q32

You must now bid 1S. Partner may have 14 points and may not have had a hand with which she could bid e.g. she may have only had a doubleton club so she could not make a takeout double. And so you must keep the auction alive. You would not dream of overcalling 1S with the hand above if RHO had opened 1H and you were now in direct seat, but you must not let the opponents buy this contract for 1H. Push them higher or hope to buy the contract for your side.

If you need a write-up on balancing, send an email to Barbara.

THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS

Some material from www.pattayabridge.com

Jean-René Vernes first 'invented' the Law of Total Tricks in 1968.

Although known about for more than twenty years, The Law of Total Tricks was not widely recognized until it was much publicized by Marty Bergen and Larry Cohen in the early 1990's.

A popular version of the LAW is that in a competitive situation, where the points are roughly equal between the two sides, it is correct to compete to the level of the combined number of trumps held by your side.

Let's have a look at a typical 'LAW' deal with everybody vulnerable:

East (A)

S 852
 H QJ8
 D 532
 C QJ106

West North East South

1H 1S 2H 2S
 Pass Pass ??

You hold this East hand A, should you compete with 3H or not?
 The answer is no.

You appear to have only 8 combined trumps and 3H will probably go down, likely doubled.

East (B)

S 852
 H QJ84
 D 53
 C QJ106

West North East South

1H 1S 2H 2S
 Pass Pass ??

Now we have changed the hand slightly so that you have an extra trump. This time you know that your side has 9 combined trumps and you should compete to 3H.

Dealer: West - Both Vul.

	S AQ763	
	H 76	
	D KQJ	
	C 942	
S 104		S 852
H AK932	N	H QJ8
D A976	W – E	D 532
C K3	S	C QJ106
	S KJ9	
	H 1054	
	D 1084	
	C A875	

Above is the complete deal (with East A).

Note that each side has 8 trumps and that N-S can make 2S and E-W can make 2H.

If you exchange South's H4 with East's D2 East then has hand B and E-W can make 3H but N-S can still only make 2S.

This is a very simple example of The Law of Total Tricks. There are dozens of examples of The Law of Total Tricks in "To Bid or Not to Bid" by Larry Cohen.

The following is taken from the new Encyclopedia of Bridge

The Law is a useful bidding adjunct in competitive auctions. You **will not** need to use it when you DO have 26 points between the two hands (you and partner)...you know that you only need 8 trumps between you to make 4H or 4S IF you own 26 points between the two hands.

Experienced players work out how many trumps each partnership has and then they use the formula as a guideline. Knowing the number of trumps gives the competitor a good estimate of how many tricks are available. This knowledge will often lead to making the correct bidding decision.

A simple way to use the Law is to "always bid to the level of your side's number of trumps" (when you are competing in the bidding) or pre-empting. In the case of pre-empting, you may not be hearing your opponents physically bidding but they would have been bidding if you had not gotten in their way. Spelled out, this all means:

When you do NOT have 26 points between you (including distribution)

With 8 trumps between you and partner, compete to the 2 level.

With 9 trumps between you and partner, compete to the 3 level.

With 10 trumps between you and partner, compete to the 4 level.

e.g. You hold the following hand and you hear your partner open with 2S. What should you bid?

S 852

H xx

D Kxxxx

C xxx

Yes, bid 3S. That just says: "Partner, you've got trash, I've got more trash!"
Add one spade now and take away a club...bid 4S now.

You are making life difficult for your opponents. Here's a hand to look at:

	S A63 H 763 D K864 C J94	
S 104 H KQ1095 D 1053 C AQ3	N W-E S	S J52 H J42 D QJ7 C K865
	S KQ987 H A8 D A92 C 1072	

S W N E

1S 2H 2S 3H* *This first bid does not defy the law. Just shows 6-9 & support.
?

You only have 8 trump so you should not bid on. IF North were to have 4 card support, then he could bid again after 3H.

The opponents will go down in 3H, you will go down in 3S. But by passing, at least you will get a plus.

Now give yourself (South) a sixth spade:

	S A63 H 763 D K864 C J94	
S 104 H KQ1095 D 1053 C AQ3	N W-E S	S QJ H J42 D QJ7 C K8652
	S K98752 H A8 D A92 C 107	

S W N E

1S 2H 2S 3H
?

This time you have 9 trumps between you so bid 3S. You can make 3S. 3H goes down.

What if the spades broke 3-1 instead of 2-2? You would go down but then 3H would make. Bidding 3S is still right.

APPLYING THE LAW

To use the LAW effectively, we don't need an exact count of the trumps. We just need to be aware of how many trumps there are based on our own hand and the bidding.

You hold:

S KQJ1062

H KQ5

D 43

C 82

You are South and open 1S, your LHO (Left Hand Opponent) overcalls 2D, your partner raises to 2S and RHO bids 3D.

S	W	N	E
1S	2D	2S	3D

Let's see how many trumps there are. Partner probably has three spades for his raise (and if he has four, he'll probably go on to 3S no matter what we do), so our side has 9 trumps. They have at least eight diamonds for their 2 level overcall and raise. (Possibly 9) EW has 9 trumps so South must bid 3S. (Here is what the hand may have looked like. Understanding the LAW helps you to decide whether "to bid or not to bid").

	S A54	
	H A104	
	D 85	
	C 106543	
S 973	N	S 8
H 972	W-E	H J863
D AKJ107	S	D Q962
C AQ		C KJ97
	S KQJ1062	
	H KQ5	
	D 43	
	C 82	

One more example:

You hold these cards: **You are South:**

S Q1054

H Q9875

D J32

C 7

Your Partner (North) opens the bidding.

North (Partner)	East	South (You)	West
1NT	P	2C	Dbl
2H	P	P	3C
P	P	?	

You should now bid 3H even though you have a very poor hand. Your partner has FOUR hearts and you have FIVE hearts. Bid to the level of the number of trumps your side holds.

REMEMBER: By *compete*, we mean this: First, bid your hand according to your point count. Later, if the opponents bid higher, you may bid again—but only if you are raising to a level that matches the total number of trumps your partnership holds between the two hands.

ALSO REMEMBER: You do not use the law when your side has 26 points (including distribution) between the two hands.

THE BATH COUP

The Bath Coup in bridge is a classic declarer play where you deliberately duck the opening lead of a king when holding the ace and jack, aiming to disrupt the defenders' communication and timing.

Here's the essence:

- The typical holding by declarer (South) is A-J-x in a suit.
- If West leads the king, declarer does not take the trick immediately.
- By ducking, declarer forces the defense into an awkward position: if West continues, they risk giving declarer a free finesse; if West switches, declarer gains tempo to establish tricks elsewhere.
- The coup often results in declarer winning two tricks with the ace and jack, instead of just one, while also slowing down the defenders' ability to run the suit.

In short, the Bath Coup is a hold-up play with extra bite—it not only delays the opponents' attack but can also turn their strong lead into a liability. Here's an article by Steve Becker to illustrate this.

Bridge by Steve Becker, from The Globe and Mail

East dealer. East-West vulnerable.

Some plays are so well-known that when the opportunity to use one of them arises, there is a tendency to make the play automatically, without pause for

thought. This is a somewhat dangerous practice, since what is right on most occasions might easily be wrong on a particular deal.

Take this case where West led the king of hearts against three notrump.

East Deals		♠ 8 5 4	
E-W Vul		♥ 9 3	
		♦ Q J 9 3	
		♣ A K 5 4	
♠ Q J 2		<div style="background-color: green; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> N W → E S </div>	♠ K 10 9 7
♥ <u>K</u> Q 10 8 7			♥ 6 4 2
♦ K 4			♦ 8 6 5 2
♣ 9 3 2			♣ 10 8
		♠ A 6 3	
		♥ A J 5	
		♦ A 10 7	
		♣ Q J 7 6	
	10		
	11 3		
	16		
West	North	East	South
Pass	3 NT	Pass	1 NT
		All pass	
Lead: ♥ K			

Recognizing the chance for a "Bath Coup," declarer allowed West's king to hold the trick, hoping West would continue with a heart into the A-J. Unfortunately, this was a case where the cure proved worse than the disease.

Warned against a heart continuation by partner's discouraging deuce, West switched to the spade queen. South ducked, but when West continued with the jack, covered by East with the king, declarer was well on his way to irreversible defeat. If he ducked the king, East would return a heart through the A-J, while if he won the trick, the defenders would finish with three spades, a heart and the diamond king for down one.

South should have realized that ducking the heart king in this case was wrong for two reasons. First, West was very likely to shift to a spade; second, South was in a position to guarantee a minimum of nine tricks if he took the first trick with the ace. He would then cross to dummy with a club and lead the diamond queen.

If East had the king and did not cover, the finesse could be repeated to yield at least three diamond tricks. And if the finesse lost to West, declarer, with the J-5 of hearts serving as a stopper, would have nine

ironclad tricks consisting of three diamonds, four clubs and the two major-suit aces.

All of which goes to prove once again that a little knowledge can sometimes be a dangerous thing.