

## Purpose

- This lesson is designed to improve your intuition about how good your hand is
- It introduces three important concepts:
  - 1. Cover Cards
  - 2. Context
  - 3. Margin of Safety

## Losers and Covers

- The total number of losing tricks in your hand shows how much playing strength you have.
- Your number of covers for partner's losers allows you to judge how many tricks your side can muster.  $\text{Tricks} = 13 - [L - C]$
- For more detail about classical and modern losing trick count, see the technical scripted briefing on our website, called Pointless Remarks.

The losing trick count has been recognized since 1915 as a good measure of playing strength.

The concept has been revived in 1934, 1954, 1974, 1994 and most recently by Australian Bridge writer Ron Klinger.

Cover cards were introduced by George Rosenkrantz in 1974.

If you have seven losers, you usually have an opening hand. Normal responses, raises and rebids show a particular range of face cards and ruffing values, not all of which will necessarily be aligned with partner's needs.

Subtract covers from losers and you know how many tricks you can take:

$$\text{TRICKS} = 13 - [L - C].$$

## Counting Covers

- 1 for each high card in partner's suits
- 1 for each Ace or King in unbid suits
- $\frac{1}{2}$  for a Queen in an unbid suit
- 1 for each singleton, if trumps adequate
- $\frac{1}{2}$  for each doubleton in an unbid suit
- [The "half values" stand in for potential covers, which may be promoted later.]

When your partner bids a suit, you know that any high cards you hold in his suit are certain to cover one or more of his losers. Shortness in one of his side suits may cover his side losers, if you have enough trumps.

High cards outside partner's known suits are only potential covers, since your high cards may match up with his singletons or voids.

Until you know otherwise, you can assume that an outside ace or king covers a loser. Your singletons are treated as covers, as well.

Queens and doubletons are treated as potential covers. They are counted as  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cover, unless partner's rebids confirm that they cover a loser or do not.

### Easy Example of cover cards:

- Your partner opens 2 clubs; you bid 2 diamonds. Partner rebids 2 spades, you say 3 clubs; then partner bids six clubs.
- What is his hand?
- What do you bid holding this hand?
- S: Qx
- H: A10x
- D: Kxx
- C: Q10xxx

This hand occurred on Tuesday 7 July 2015.

Partner's two club bid corresponds to a hand with three or four losers. Your response shows at least one ace or king.

Partner has shown a big two-suited hand. He assumes you have at least five clubs and no more than two spades [you didn't raise]. His six bid must show at least 5-4 or longer in the black suits and with the ace and king in both suits. Since you see from the queens in your own hand that he has two losers in the black suits, he must have control of both red suits.

He may have a heart void, or more likely, a heart singleton and the ace and queen of diamonds. He knows that you have at least one ace or king and that it is red. At worst, he is expecting to have the slam depend upon a diamond finesse, even if your high card is badly placed and he cannot set up enough spade tricks to discard your diamond losers.

If partner needed only one cover to have some play for six, then you should expect to make 14 tricks in clubs.

## VALUE DEPENDS UPON CONTEXT; THE AUCTION PROVIDES IT

Which hand is better?

S: Axx H: QXXX D: xx C: XXXX

OR

S: Qxx H: Axxx D: xx C: xxxx

INSIDE and OUTSIDE EVALUATION – BOLS TIP WINNER

Eddie Kantar: Hands are better with low honors  
IN partner's suit and high honors OUT of his suit.

Value depends upon context.

IF partner bids one spade, the second hand is better.

IF partner bids one heart, the first hand is better.

IN MY TERMS: COUNT THE COVERS

If the queen is in partner's suit, it is a sure cover; If the queen is outside,  
It is only a potential cover.

So, one hand covers two losers, the other covers only 1 ½, in high cards.

The doubleton diamond is also a potential cover.

If partner opens one heart, the first example might compete to the three level, since it has the extra trump length to draw trump from either side and then ruff diamonds on the board or clubs in declarer's hand.

# Margin of Safety

Simple Raise =  $1\frac{1}{2}$  or 2 Covers [Expect to make 2 level contract]

Limit Raise =  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or 3 Covers [Expect to make 3 level contract]

Forcing Raise =  $3\frac{1}{2}$  or 4 Covers [Ten Trick Contracts]

Note: an opening bid suggests partner has four covers for your best suit, should you name the trump suit.

Positive Response to Two Club Bid = 1 Cover;

## How Cover Cards Relate to Normal Actions by Responder

The basic idea is to provide some margin of safety in your bidding, so that each potential contract reached during an auction depends upon a finesse, at worst, assuming normal suit splits.

Opener's actions should be calibrated according to the same notion of margin of safety. If a rebid forces partner to respond at a higher level, it should promise that you have sufficient strength for the higher contract to be safe.

This means that a game try over a raise should show a six loser hand. You are asking partner to either reveal card locations or assess whether his cards can cover three of opener's side suit losers

A reverse forces the bidding to the three level opposite a minimum hand, so opener should again have no more than six losers.

A game forcing rebid should show five losers.

A 2NT opening should have five losers

A 2 Club bid should have three or four losers.

## Now, What About Points?

- Forget about them.
- Use loser count and cover cards to guide your bidding of suit contracts.
- An Ace is 1 cover; Two Q's might be 0, 1 or 2
- A Jack is nothing, but AJ10 is about 2 covers. Honors in combination increase the value of your hand.
- Remember that value depends upon Context

Show examples of points wasted and of perfectly fitting cards to make the point that good bidding is not accidental.

## N six losers – S three covers

N-S can make 10 tricks in either major – But won't bid game.

They need to discover that their cards are working.

They must also realize that 6-4 distribution is the strongest possible of the "normal" hands.

Assuming that the bidding goes

P- 1S – 2C – dbl

P - ?

North must bid 3 hearts for South to see that he has three covers for partner's six losers.

Bd: 4	♠ AK10763	Optimum NS 650
Vul: All	♥ 9864	
Dir: West	♦ K74	
	♣ —	
♠ 985	N	♠ Q4
♥ J103	W 4 E	♥ A7
♦ 1098		♦ A532
♣ Q964	S	♣ AK753
10	♠ J2	♣♦♥♠ N
3 HCP17	♥ KQ52	N 6 7 10 11 7
10	♦ QJ6	S 6 7 10 11 7
	♣ J1082	E 7 5 2 2 5
		W 7 6 2 2 5

Each pair has 20 points. N-S can make 11 tricks in their best suit, whereas, E-W can make only seven.

CONTEXT!



## W 6 ½ L – E 3+ C

After West opens 1 spade, East has two sure covers – plus a potential trick in diamonds and clubs, plus a possible ruffing value in clubs. There is also a possible length trick in hearts.

So, the East hand is worth an invitation and West accepts.

If North intervenes, East's hand improves: he should double and plan to bid game over partner's rebid.

Bd: 18	♠ K	Optimum EW 450
Vul: N/S	♥ QJ5	
Dir: East	♦ K10543	
	♣ KJ87	
♠ AJ10654	N	♠ Q98
♥ 94	W 18 E	♥ A8762
♦ A8	S	♦ Q62
♣ A93		♣ Q6
13	♠ 732	♣♦♥♠ N
13HCP10	♥ K103	N 6 6 3 1 3
4	♦ J97	S 6 6 3 1 3
	♣ 10542	E 7 6 9 11 10
		W 7 6 10 11 10

Context matters.

If interference comes from the south hand, east's queens are badly placed.

This would make a game invitation a slight overbid. Interference from the north would make an invitation an underbid.

The hand analysis assumes you will drop the offside spade king. If north bids over 1 spade, you should assume he has the king and try to drop it. A heart lead should make it obvious: There are 16 points against you, North lacks the heart king, so he needs the spade king or extraordinary distribution for a vulnerable overcall in a broken suit.