Rubens' Pearls on Hand Evaluation (6)

……….on VALUATION TECHNIQUES: LOSING TRICK COUNT

➤ An Adjustment to the Losing Trick Count

*The original Losing Trick Count (LTC) evaluation method, as still followed by many players, comprises counting three losers for a three or more card suit if it does not include an Ace, King or Queen. For suits shorter than three, the number of losers is reduced accordingly but with account taken of what the honour is, if one is present. **If the partnership has a suit fit** then the combined loser count can be subtracted from 24 to give the number of tricks expected to be taken. One of the weaknesses of the method is that the relative power of the honours is not taken into proper account. The relatively simple approach below by Rubens, who was not really an advocate of the LTC evaluation system, is an early attempt to recognize the different power of the honours.*

As was observed in Exercise 3, the original Losing Trick Count, unlike the High Card Point Count, can cope with honour duplication because it doesn't count twice for honour strength in a short suit. It does well in comparing honour strength with distributional strength. However, it doesn't handle duplication in controls if one hand has control of a suit via primary honours while the other controls the same suit via shortage. Its logic does not differentiate in the power of the top three honours. Two losers are accorded to an (at least three-card) suit irrespective of whether it be headed by the Ace, the King or the Queen. Despite the guideline that opening hands have seven losers or less, highly distributed hands will also be anomalous. Who would open this notionally 7 loser hand Qxxxxx xxxxx x x and who would not open this notionally 8 loser hand Axx   Axx Axxx Axx?

To counter these shortcomings, Rubens suggests use the original LTC if your hand has only Kings or the same number of Aces as Queens. However, if the number of Aces exceeds the number of Queens, subtract half a loser off the total for every Ace in excess. For every Queen in excess of the number of Aces, add half a loser. Rubens suggests that this Adjusted Loser Count is useful when attempting to make a close decision on how high to bid after a trump fit has been established.
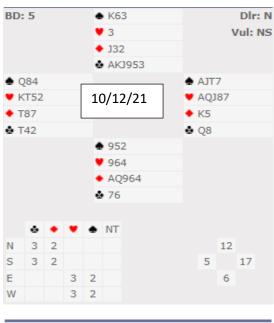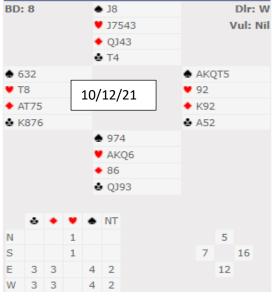

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	Pass	1S
Pass	2C	Pass	??

Using the In-and-Out, technique, the West hand complies well as far as primary honours outside the club suit but the trump support is only fair. The Adjusted LTC reduces West's losers from 7 to 6. Given overall good support but assuming partner has fewer than 7 losers since she did not open, West shows modest interest in going further by raising partner to 3C. Superficially, East has only 6 losers and based on the Losing Trick Count should bid game. The Adjusted LTC, which aims to compensate for the reduced power of Queens, increases her losers to 7. In reality, East does not have a game going hand with poor support for West's spade suit and lack of controls elsewhere. At best she could invite with 4C, but passing is certainly an option.
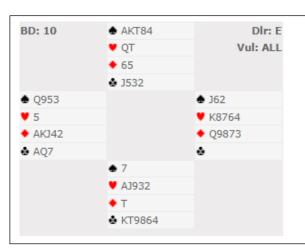
More modern refinements of the Losing Trick Count exist which aim to address the imbalance between an Ace ad a Queen. One straightforward practice is to count Qxx as 3 losers and only reduce this to 2 losers if the Q is supported by the J or 10. (i.e. QJx or Q10x).

Answers to Exercise (5):

BD: 5   Dlr: N   Vul: NS

North: ♠ K63 ♥ 3 ♦ J32 ♣ AKJ953
West: ♠ Q84 ♥ KT52 ♦ T87 ♣ T42
East: ♠ AJT7 ♥ AQJ87 ♦ K5 ♣ Q8
South: ♠ 952 ♥ 964 ♦ AQ964 ♣ 76

10/12/21

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT		
N	3	2					12
S	3	2				5	17
E			3	2		6	
W			3	2			

West (you)	North (Dealer)	East	South
	1C	Double	1D
Pass	2C	2H	Pass
??			

Your partner is showing a strong hand (16+HCPs) with a heart suit. Having passed originally, do you now raise partner with 4-card support and 5HCPs?

In support of partner's suit, the In-and-Out principle states that it is better to have your primary honours outside the trump suit and the secondary honours inside the trump suit. Pass.

BD: 8   Dlr: W   Vul: Nil

North: ♠ J8 ♥ J7543 ♦ QJ43 ♣ T4
West: ♠ 632 ♥ T8 ♦ AT75 ♣ K876
East: ♠ AKQT5 ♥ 92 ♦ K92 ♣ A52
South: ♠ 974 ♥ AKQ6 ♦ 86 ♣ QJ93

10/12/21

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT		
N			1				5
S			1			7	16
E	3	3	4	2		12	
W	3	3	4	2			

West (you, dealer)	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1S	Double
2S	Pass	3C	Pass
??			

Your partner is showing a hand with interest in game by bidding a help suit. Having raised partner to 2S originally, do you now bid 3S or 4S?

You have only 7HCPs but your primary honours are located outside your partner's trump suit and you have good support for her Help suit. A bid of 4S is justified.

Exercise (6):

BD: 10   Dlr: E   Vul: ALL

North: ♠ AKT84 ♥ QT ♦ 65 ♣ J532
West: ♠ Q953 ♥ 5 ♦ AKJ42 ♣ AQ7
East: ♠ J62 ♥ K8764 ♦ Q9873 ♣
South: ♠ 7 ♥ AJ932 ♦ T ♣ KT9864

How many combined losers does the Loser Trick Count and Ruben's Adjusted Loser Trick Count suggest for an E-W diamond contract and a North South club contract?
E-W can actually only make 9 tricks in diamonds. Where do both Losing Trick Counts fall down in predicting a more accurate outcome for E-W?