

Tidbit 15

In NT count your winners first/in a suit contract count your losers

Interpretation:

This “idiom” is clear enough as a guideline but what is the reasoning? Well, there is some controversy around this one even to the extent of some arguing (the ideal) that both should be counted or even the opposite! [count your winners in NT count your losers in trump - Bing](#)

The simplest rationale is that it is difficult to count your losers at the outset of a NT contract because you may not know, for example, whether Qxx or Jxxx and nothing much else is going to provide a stopper in that suit or how many tricks the defenders are going to take if they get in when you have no (remaining) stoppers in a suit. In a trump contract, the defence has no chance to run away with lots of tricks in a side suit, in which you are weak, because you can ruff. Therefore, counting your losers at the outset in trumps is simpler.

In a NT contract you often have at least one weak suit where you may have one stopper only or even none at all. If you have one stopper for a short suit led initially, it is important to see if you can get to the required number of tricks without having to risk letting the defenders in. Count your certain winners and if that means you must risk letting them in to win enough tricks for your contract, attack the suit, with least risk, which will get you home. For example, taking a finesse would be safer than leading a suit in which you lack the Ace.

Example:

BOARD 1					
BD: 1	♠ AQ7532				Dir: N
	♥ 86				Vul: Nil
	♦ Q2				
	♣ KQ6				
♠ K			♠ JT64		
♥ 95			♥ AKQJ7		
♦ AK9853			♦ 74		
♣ 7543			♣ A8		
	♠ 98				
	♥ T432				
	♦ JT6				
	♣ JT92				
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT				
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	5	3	1	2
W	2	5	3	1	2
					13
					10 15
					2

Bidding:

North	East	South	West
1S	2H	Pass	3D
Pass	3NT		

South led 9S to North’s AS and North found a great switch to the KC. East ducked, South encouraged so North continued with the QC to East’s AC.

East counts her certain tricks and comes to 4 x hearts, 2 x diamonds and 1 x club = 7. A further trick is most likely available in hearts. East must lose a trick in diamonds in order to set the suit up and can make the required ninth trick in spades after losing to the QS. Since East cannot be sure to avoid losing a diamond to South which appears to be the danger hand in clubs, she should lead the JS. If North has another club, South can have held only 4 x clubs which is too few to defeat your contract.

Exercise:

Bidding:

North	East	South	West
1S	2H	Pass	3D
Pass	3NT	Pass	4H

In the hand above, the bidding now results in a 4H contract. South leads the 9S, North wins and switches to the KC which East wins with the AC. How many losers does East count and what suit and cards should she play next?

Answer to Tidbit 14 Exercise:

BOARD 3				
BD: 3	♠ T73			Dlr: S
	♥ AQ2			Vul: EW
	♦ AT84			
	♣ QJ2			
♠ Q92			♠ KJ5	
♥ J9753			♥ K86	
♦ K6			♦ 952	
♣ A93			♣ T865	
	♠ A864			
	♥ T4			
	♦ QJ73			
	♣ K74			
	♣	♦	♥	♠
N	2	3	1	3
S	2	3	1	3
E	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-
				NT
				13
			10	7
				10

Bidding: You are North.

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1D	Pass
1S	Pass	1NT	Pass

East leads the 5C to West's AC and West returns the 9C to your JC, East's 6C and you overtake with the KC in the dummy. You lead the QD which is covered by the KD to your AD. You play the 10D and both the defenders follow. You now play to one of the winning diamonds in dummy, West discarding a heart. What do you play next?

You now know for certain that you will make 4 x diamond tricks, 1 x spade, 1 x heart and 2 x club = 8 tricks = 1 overtrick.

Leave one of the top diamonds in the dummy as a possible entry that may be needed for later.

It is tempting to take the heart finesse next to see if you can win your ninth trick but it is a short suit and this is not urgent since it appears East started with only 4 x clubs. Spades hold some possibility of a ninth trick as well. Keep your powder dry and duck a round of spades because the defence may then open up the heart suit to your advantage, especially if East leads hearts.

Lead a small spade towards the 10S. East will likely win with the JS. With careful play you can still make nine tricks via 2 x spade tricks even though the heart finesse does not work and even if the defence chose not to lead hearts themselves.