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The true value of honor cards— part 2

Last month we discussed the fact that the traditional 4-3-2-1 point count is not totally accurate. Kings are evaluated correctly, but it underrates aces and 10s and overrates queens and jacks.

I propose something that is more accurate called Adjust-3.

A quick review of Adjust-3

Step 1: Count your high-card points in the traditional way.

Step 2: Underrated honors: How many aces and 10s?

Step 3: Overrated honors: How many queens and jacks?

Step 4: Subtract the smaller number from the larger.

Step 5: Consider the result of the subtraction:

- ❖ If fewer than 3, make no adjustment.
- ❖ If 3-5, adjust by 1 point.
- ❖ If difference is 6 or more (rare), adjust by 2 points.

Step 6: If you have more underrated honors, add; if you have more overrated honors, subtract.

Better Bridge with Bergen

Last month we looked at two examples. Let's look at two more. You hold:

♠KQ4 ♥AJ95 ♦KJ93 ♣K10.

You have a traditional 17 HCP. You have two underrated honors (one ace and one 10) and three overrated honors (one queen and two jacks). So, the formula is: $3 - 2 = 1$. Look at step 5 — you don't need to make an adjustment. The Adjust-3 total is 17, the same as the traditional method. The computer sez $16\frac{3}{4}$, so 17 is close enough.

You hold:

♠A74 ♥10943 ♦AK106 ♣K2.

Your traditional point count is 14 HCP. You have four underrated honors (two aces and two 10s) and no overrated honors. The formula is: $4 - 0 = 4$. Look at Step 5 and you see you should add 1 HCP. The Adjust-3 total for this hand is 15 HCP. The computer sez $15\frac{1}{2}$.

At this point, I hope your thoughts are, "That wasn't so bad at all." The four examples that illustrate Adjust-3 (two last month and two this month) have more in common than the fact that they represent opening bids with identical distribution. After applying Adjust-3, all are balanced hands with 15-17 HCPs and I would, therefore, open each one of them with 1NT.

Traditional 4-3-2-1 point count is not totally accurate. It underrates aces and 10s, and overrates queens and jacks.

If you agree, then follow the ACBL recommendation to indicate this approach both on the convention card and when Announcing your 1NT range as "14+ to 18-."

If you like shortcuts, here are some Adjust-3 quickies for HCP based on Adjust-3:

With three underrated honors, add 1 HCP. Therefore:

three aces = 13 HCP
two aces + one 10 = 9 HCP
three 10s = 1 HCP
one ace + two 10s = 5 HCP

With three overrated honors, subtract 1 HCP:

three queens = 5 HCP
three jacks = 2 HCP
two queens + one jack = 4 HCP
one queen + two jacks = 3 HCP

Many hands require upgrading or downgrading, and accuracy is a must. That is especially true on slam deals, because good slam bidding is extremely difficult. That's not an opinion — it's a fact. Even the best expert partnerships often fail to hit the mark. Adjust-3 can be the first step in good hand evaluation. □

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