

COUNTING DECLARER'S HCP AS A DEFENDER

By Maritha Pottenger

Most bidding sequences define Declarer's hand within a fairly narrow range. Assume Declarer has the middle of that range and you should know Declarer's HCP within 1 or 2 points. With a 15-17 NT range, assume Declarer has 16 HCP and go from there. If Declarer's rebid showed 12-14 HCP, assume 13 in the beginning. (If you must assume that Declarer is minimum in order to defeat the contract, you may do so.) Remember the general guidelines:

Declarer Opens with a Preempt:	6-10 HCP
Declarer Opens One of a Suit	11-14 or 15 (if minimum rebid is made)
Declarer Opens One of a Suit	15-17 or 18 (if extra values are shown)
Declarer Opens One & Jump Shifts	18-21 HCP
Declarer Opens 2 Clubs	22+ HCP

If Responder ends up being the Declarer:

Minimum Response:	6-9 or 10
Invitational Bid Made	10-12
Game-Forcing Bid Made	12+ to 15
Slam Try	16-19
Slam Force	20 or more

If a limited hand accepts an invitation, assume the top of the range for that hand. If a limited hand declines an invitation, assume the bottom of the range for that hand.

When Dummy comes down, add those points to Declarer's likely point count, and your points. Subtract from 40 and you know what point count partner is likely to have. Make positive assumptions. For points you have NOT yet seen in partner's hand, assume they will be where you need them in order to set the contract and defend accordingly. (With matchpoints, you have to be more conservative in this regard.)

When a weak Declarer shows up with lots of stuff early in the hand, you can assume that partner has anything that is not yet seen. When partner leads an honor card, you can usually figure out Declarer's honor holding (if any) and number of tricks in that suit. When you lead an honor card, your partner's signal gives you information about Declarer's strength in that suit.

When partner leads a suit and you win with the lowest of equals (Queen from AKQ), **playing the Ace next implies strength in a higher side suit. Playing the King next implies strength in a lower side suit.** This is a subtle extension of suit preference signals.

Keep track of what Declarer shows up with throughout the hand. It will help you know who has what at the end of the hand.

When there is no other possible source of tricks in the side suits, look to the trump suit for defensive tricks. You may be able to arrange an uppercut. (This may entail giving Declarer a useless ruff-and-sluff. It will only be useless to declarer if you have cashed all your available side suit winners first.)