

## COUNT WINNERS....COUNT LOSERS by Maritha Pottenger

One key to successful Declarer play is to count your winners and losers in a hand—before you play to the first trick.

You are Declarer in 3NT holding: 763 K7 QJ983 KJ4 opposite AKQ4 A6 K10 Q6532. The lead is the Jack of hearts. You can count only 5 top tricks, so you must develop 4 more. The diamond suit has better spots than the club suit. (If clubs are 4-1, you will only get 2 club tricks after knocking out the Ace. No matter how the diamonds break, you will get 4 diamond tricks after knocking out the Ace.) You cannot afford to go after BOTH suits because the opponents will knock out your last heart stopper as soon as you give them the lead with one minor Ace—and then take at least 3 heart tricks once they get the lead again.) But you must remember transportation—what will happen if the opponent holding the Ace of diamonds ducks twice? You can afford to overtake the 10 of diamonds with the Jack to force out the Ace. However, if you took the first heart trick in your hand with the King, kiss good-bye to your diamonds with good defense. You **MUST** take first heart trick on dummy with the Ace & play top two diamonds, overtaking if needed.

You are in 3NT holding: 962 AK8 A6 Q9732 opposite AQ105 4 KQJ7 J1065 and the lead is the 5 of hearts (4<sup>th</sup>-best). You can only count 7 top tricks. The opponents have 9 hearts between them, so will get at least 3 more hearts once your 2<sup>nd</sup> stopper is gone. That means you **DO NOT HAVE THE TIME** to knock out the Ace and the King of clubs. (They will get 3 hearts and AK of clubs which is down 1 **BEFORE** you can get your 9 tricks.) Your only real shot for an 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> trick is the spade suit. Run the 9 of spades at trick 2. If it loses to the King, you have three more spade tricks. If it loses to the Jack, take the heart return and play a spade to the 10. The double-finesse is 75% in favor of you making 3 out of 4 spade tricks.

You are in 3NT holding: AQ7 KQ5 AQ2 9754 opposite 62 J84 KJ53 AQJ3 with the lead of a small spade. You can count 7 top tricks. Either hearts or clubs offer possibilities for tricks #8 and #9. The clubs are a lure & temptation—resist! When clubs break 3-2, you'll be safe. However, when clubs break 4-1 or even 5-0, you will only make 1 extra club trick (besides the Ace). [Worst case scenarios is K108x or K10862 behind dummy's AQJ.] Remember, you have already counted the Ace of clubs in your trick total!! Hearts are the sure thing. After knocking out the Ace of hearts, you have two **sure** tricks—and your contract!

You are in 4S holding: K109762 A53 65 K4 opposite J83 K74 AK72 QJ5 with the Jack of hearts lead. If you count winners, you have only 4 top winners, but can develop two club winners and expect to take 4 or 5 spades. Here, however, **you must count losers**. You have a sure club loser (the ace); a sure heart loser; and one or two possible spade losers. Thus, if spades are sitting badly (AQ behind your K109762), you must get rid of another loser. The heart loser—because it is a “slow” loser—is the only one you can escape. Trick two you must play the King of clubs. If that is ducked, play a low club to the queen. If the opponents duck clubs twice, you've eliminated your club loser. If they take the Ace of clubs, you pitch your third (losing heart) on the Jack of clubs **before you ever touch the trump suit** (and before they knock out your other top heart).

You hold K10964 6 A92 KQ74 (with opening bidder on your left) and partner—after making an aggressive “Michaels cue bid” gives you this dummy: AQJ3 Q97543 75 2 (a heart more and a spade less than you expected). A trump is led. You expect to take 5 spades in your hand, the Ace of diamonds, one club and 2 ruffs (probably—perhaps only 1 ruff if trump break badly) in dummy. That is only 9 (or 8) tricks, so you **MUST** go after hearts. Lead a heart at trick 2 and you'll make your contract. Lead any other card and you go down.