

## WASHINGTON BRIDGE LEAGUE

We offer our thanks to Washington Bridge league as we, present a copy from their 2012 March -Apr bulletin on Major Suit Raises by columnists > Ron Zucker and Shawn Stringer. Read original - [Here](#)

### MAJOR SUIT RAISES - COMPETITIVE AUCTIONS

Last month, we discussed the preemptive raise to 4M to make it tough for the opponents to get into the bidding. We saw that it was relatively easy to develop guidelines to help decide whether or not to take the leap to the four level. It is more difficult to know if you should bid again when you are in a competitive auction at the two or three level. Your thought process should go like this: Are the opp's trying to "steal" our hand? Do we belong at the three level? Will they double us in 3©? Can we beat their part score? Can we beat them enough if, in fact, we can make 3?

One tool that is useful in fighting the part score battle is the *Law of Total Tricks* (sometimes simply called the "LAW".) The Law of Total Tricks was introduced in the 1950's and has been discussed and written about extensively. For a thorough study, pick up one of the popular books and read to your heart's content. Our goal, in this limited space, is to get you thinking about the relevant concepts and how they may help your competitive bidding.

In a nutshell, the LAW suggests that the total number of tricks possible in a given hand is roughly equal to the total number of trump held by both sides, each in its respective trump suit. So, if your side has 9 clubs and the opponents have 8 diamonds, then there should be 17 possible tricks in the hand when the hand is played once in clubs and once diamonds. Maybe you can take 9 tricks if you declare and the opponents can take eight if they declare. Or maybe you can take ten tricks and they can take only seven. Note that the LAW tells how many total tricks can be made, but does not guarantee how many either side can make.

The most important follow-up concept that flows from the Law of Total Tricks is this: when you want to compete for a part score, you are safe at the level roughly equal to your side's number of trump. Does that mean that if you have nine trump you will always make your three level contract? Of course not. Nor does it mean that you cannot compete to a level higher than your number of trump. What it does mean – from a scoring perspective – is that you will be relatively safe at that level. It also means that if the opponents can make their two level contract, you should consider competing to the three level if you have a fit of your own. That is because your matchpoint loss is likely to be less than letting them make their contract.

Let's look at a bidding sequence that you probably encounter every time you play and see how our LAW concepts apply. South opens and the bidding goes:

| North   | South   | West | East |
|---------|---------|------|------|
| 2 Heart | 1 Heart | Pass | Pass |
|         | Pass    | ???  |      |

N-S are stopping in a part score. Should West pass or compete?

Here is how West should be thinking: N/S is in a known eight –card fit. We probably have a fit of our own. N/S have shown roughly half the deck, so we have roughly half the deck as well. If I pass, we will likely score -110 or -140. If I compete, we may be -50 or -100 or we may even be +110, all of which are winning strategies. We may also push them to 3H which they cannot make, and we will be +50 or +100. On the other hand, we may not have a fit. And we may get doubled and go for a minus bigger than their part score. So, what to do?

When you are at the table and are considering your options, here are some practical hints to guide your decision:

1. Watch the vulnerability – at Matchpoints, -200 is a terrible score. Non-vulnerable, -50 or even -100 is often the winning score.
2. Soft values in opponents' suit suggest passing. ©Kx or ©Qxx usually take more tricks on defense than offense. On the other hand, having xx or xxx in their suit suggest making a balancing call.
3. The more distributional your hand, the safer it is to get into the auction. A six card suit is great. A singleton heart makes it almost mandatory that you bid or double 4. It is easier to balance over their 2© if you have four or more spades. If they are bidding spades, getting into the auction is somewhat more risky because there is no suit you can play at the two level.

In summary, try not to let the opponents play at the two level. Use these guidelines and see if you can be more active in competing, either to win the contract or to push the opponents out of their comfort zone. You may get set, but in the long run, your strategy will pay off in spades.

Contact Ron or Shawn if you have any questions.

Next month, we'll start showing how the Law of Total Tricks guides bidding, and suggest a structure for major suit raises you can use