



Ken Eichenbaum

**WINNERS,
LOSERS AND
COVER CARDS**

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Winners, Losers, and Cover Cards

“For Those Hard To Reach Places”

Kenneth Eichenbaum
2009

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Foreword

The concept of Losing Trick Count has been most notably popularized by Ron Klinger. In this book, Ken Eichenbaum, a professional player from Columbus, Ohio, and a good friend of mine, takes Losing Trick Count to a different level, with his own fine-tuned analysis. His methods allow players to better evaluate Losing Trick Count with holdings that do not meet the broad brush evaluation offered by strict Losing Trick Count. Ken also introduces a lot of conventions and treatments that allow a partnership to make effective use of these evaluation tools. Having played bridge with Ken for years, I have seen the value in practice.

Ken Eichenbaum is a professional player and teacher with decades of high-level experience. He is known by many as one of the best teachers of the game you can find, because he not only presents concepts in a manner that can be understood, but he also mixes in one of the best senses of humor you can find. Many have seen that humor in his bridge plays and in his bridge humor writing. One of his early books, *Bridge Without a Partner*, while too edgy for some, remains a favorite worldwide in the bridge humor genre. While this book is more of a technique book, his skill at teaching is quite impressive.

If you ever have the pleasure of attending his classes or sitting in on a lesson, I highly recommend it, for the entertainment and laughter. The actual bridge advice is also excellent, a fringe benefit. This book gives you a taste for the advice you learn, but nothing compares with being in person.

Ken Rexford, January 2010

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to acquaint you, the reader, with the concept of losing trick count and to supply you with special bidding tools and principles which will allow you to apply the judgment gained from this concept. The use of assigning values for honors is a reasonable starting point in bidding, but understanding the concepts of *winners, losers, and cover cards* will give you a better understanding and a richer appreciation of this wonderful game of bridge.

Some of the conventions and treatments that I put forward in this book are fairly simple to use, while others are somewhat complex. You do not have to adopt all the methodology I bombard you with, you may pick and choose whatever best suits your taste. However, if you accept the *principles* I preach, and attempt to apply them, not only will you become a better player you will enjoy the game more as well.

Ken Eichenbaum
January, 2010

Chapter I. Winners, Losers, and Cover Cards

Most bridge players learn to bid using the Goren high-card-point (HCP) method. An ace = 4 HCP, a king 3 HCP, a queen 2 HCP and a jack 1 HCP. Distribution or, *dummy* points are generally added as 1 point for a doubleton, two points for a singleton, and three points for a void. Generally speaking, your side needs about 26 combined dummy points for game in a major (ten tricks), assuming an eight-card fit. For game in no-trump, your side needs about 25-26 HCP depending on fit and trick sources. Randomly, for the most part, this idea works out a fair amount of the time, but because all the honors are proportionately weighted, and because suit lengths are not given enough weight, there are many times when you will not be evaluating properly, and therefore not achieving maximum results. By understanding and utilizing the concepts of winners, losers, and cover cards, you will be able to bid more accurately.

What is losing trick count? It is a way of evaluating the *trick taking ability* of your hand, assuming that you and your partner have at least an eight-card trump fit and will be playing the final contract in the fitting suit. Basically it says wherever there is an ace, king, or queen in a three-card suit or longer, that space is a non-loser. So, a suit of A962 is a two-loser suit; one loser for the absence of the king, and one loser for the absence of the queen. All cards which come after the first three are considered non-losers. A suit containing only two cards is given loser status based on whether it contains an ace or king only. Therefore, A7 or K7 is a one-loser suit, but Q7 would be a two-loser suit. Notice that the queen is given NO VALUE as a winner, even though it may prove to be worthwhile.

Rather than concentrating on high-card points, emphasis will be put on the number of losers your hand contains, and bids will be made in an attempt to convey the appropriate strength.

Knowing how to evaluate overall hand strength, and specific honor cards, is the main thing that separates the experts from the average player when it comes to bidding.

In order to bid accurately one must have *expectations* of what various bids may contain with regards to *trick-taking ability* and *cover cards*. Cover cards are specific honors, or distributions, which cover losers. If I hold three small cards in a

suit and you as my partner hold the ace of that suit, that ace will cover one of my losers. Additionally, if I hold three small cards in a suit and you as my partner hold a singleton, assuming you have enough trump, you will cover two of the losers in that suit via ruffs.

So, how many losers, and cover cards do various hands contain? Let's start out by looking at opening bids. You hold...

♠ **A K 6** ♥ **J 9 7 4** ♦ **A 6 3** ♣ **J 9 5**. Many of you probably use the "Bergen" *Rule of 20* when considering opening. This is reasonable, but it does not cover enough situations, and even Marty would tell you that HE does not adhere to this rule completely. This hand contains 13 HCP with seven cards in the two longest suits, giving you 20 "*rule points*," so you would open 1♣. How many losers does this hand contain? One spade, three hearts, two diamonds and three clubs = NINE losers. It is a good 9 loser hand since we have not given either jack any value, and we know jacks are worth more than nothing. However, because it is 4-3-3-3, the worth of the hand goes down because there is only one trick source, the heart suit, and that suit is weak. This is a very weak, MINIMUM opener. Let's look at another hand,

♠ **A K 6 2** ♥ **J 9** ♦ **A Q 6 3** ♣ **J 9 5**. This is a balanced fifteen count which most of you would open 1NT if playing a 15-17 HCP range. This hand contains one spade loser, two hearts, one diamond, and three clubs for a total of seven losers. This is a very sound opener as it contains five **controls** (an ace counts as two controls, and a king as one control. Aces and kings are control cards as they control initial losers.) How about another? You hold

♠ **A K 10 4 2** ♥ **9** ♦ **A 9 8 6 3** ♣ **9 3**. Although this hand contains only 11 HCP, it is the strongest of all with regards to *trick-taking ability*. This hand contains only SIX losers; one spade, one heart, two diamonds, and two clubs. You could conceivably make game opposite as little as ♠ **Q 9 7 6** ♥ **7 6 5 4** ♦ **K 7** ♣ **8 6 5**, a mere FIVE HCP! However, instead of looking at this hand as 5 HCP, look at this hand in terms of cover cards. The ♠Q covers a loser as does the ♦K. The fourth spade combined with the ruffing value in diamonds is the third cover card. Six losers minus three cover cards equal three losers, or, TEN TRICKS!

- The average opening hand which is balanced, (the "weak no-trump") containing about 12-14 HCP, will generally contain about 7-8 ½ losers.

Losing trick count is predicated on the assumption that all suits of four cards or more in length will be fitting partner's hand either in **LENGTH** or **SHORTNESS**. If partner's hand fits in length, the fourth card in the suit will be covered by attrition. Let's say you hold ♠ A 4 3 2. If spades becomes the trump suit and partner holds ♠ K 9 8 7, the king covers one loser and the length in spades will cover the fourth spade by attrition 67% of the time when the suit splits 3-2. Conversely, let's say you held ♠ A 5 4 3 2 and ♦ A 4 3 2 and partner held ♠ K 9 8 7 and ♦ K 8. The ♦K would cover one loser, and the two low spades would cover the other two diamond losers via ruffs.

Losing trick count also gives the same weight to suits headed by either the ace, king, or queen, making the assumption that if partner has fitting distribution, any honors he has will be cover cards. However, as we all know, partner does not always have fitting distribution, nor does he always hold the specific honors we need. Let's take a simple example. ♠ A 9 7 6 ♥ K 8 6 4 2 ♦ A 5 ♣ J 9 How many losers does this hand contain? Losing trick count in its simplest form would say there are seven losers; two spades, two hearts, one diamond, and two clubs. However, to get a more accurate account, we must make adjustments.

FOR THOSE 'HARD TO REACH' PLACES

You began by learning to count points, but that only got you so far. Then, someone introduced you to a new idea, Losing Trick Count. Better in theory, sure. But how do you use it? A response shows at least 6 high-card points, but how many losers? How many of these mysterious 'cover cards'? What's the range? Plus, something just seems wrong with the whole thing! How can A 3 2 be just as good as Q 3 2? That cannot be right!

Counting Goren high-card points is much easier, and is a very reasonable gauge for bidding square hands. When things start to get distributional, however, you know that you need a better way to evaluate your hand. The concept of winners, losers, and cover cards really seems to be the right path, allowing you to escape from counting points into the world of counting TRICKS!

In *Winners, Losers and Cover Cards*, Ken Eichenbaum reveals not only the secrets an expert would use to better evaluate the real power (or weakness) of your hand, but also how to use this knowledge to your advantage in a myriad number of ways. The author explains a fresh take on popular conventions and treatments, within the context of real auctions facing you at the table, and introduces novel methods, allowing you to maximize the benefit of your new understanding.



Ken Eichenbaum (Ohio) has been playing duplicate bridge since 1968 and has won numerous regional titles, including the 1987 State of Ohio pairs championship. He has been a guest lecturer at many regionals. Previous works include *Bridge Without a Partner*, *Keys to Winning Defense*, and two stage plays, *The Wizard of Odds* and *Annie Count Your Trumps*, both of which have been performed at Bridge Week in Pasadena.

