



AN HONORS eBook FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Patrick Darricades

# Optimal Hand Evaluation

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Master Point Press  
214 Merton St. Suite 205  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
M4S 1A6  
(647) 956-4933

[info@masterpointpress.com](mailto:info@masterpointpress.com)

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## FOREWORD

In his 1968 *Bridge Dictionary* (« *Dictionnaire du Bridge* », G. Versini), the author illustrates perfectly our topic with the following example of these two hands of the same side :

♠	K Q x x	♠	A J x x
♥	x	♥	x x x x
♦	x x x	♦	x x
♣	A Q x x x	♣	K x x

Which he comments on as follows : « *One can see that a 4 ♠ contract is virtually assured with these two hands, even though they total only 19 honor points and 23 HDS points (Honor, Distribution, trump Support) – while it is generally considered that 27 HDS points are needed to bid and make a major-suit game. In this case, it must be acknowledged that the Goren \* point count, universally used today, does not adequately translate this perfect Fit* ».

\* *Goren point count : Refers to the great American champion Charles Goren who popularized the addition of distribution points for short suits (3 2 1 for void, singleton and doubleton) to Milton Work's 4 3 2 1 honor point count (for Ace, K, Q, J) to reflect the total value of a hand.*

About 50 years after this very pertinent observation, we should have found a more accurate hand evaluation method that correctly assesses the *combined* value of these two hands at **29** total points – Honors, Length, Distribution and Fit points – rather than only 23 HDS points.

Surprisingly, this is not the case, despite several advances made in hand evaluation since 1968, many of which have yet to be taught today or systematically integrated by a majority of champions and experts – not even by the very pioneers of several of these advances, essentially to avoid counting in *half*-points in order to keep the point count simple...

A significant error of judgment which has unfortunately resulted in delaying for several decades the correct point count and therefore an appropriate and accurate hand evaluation.

OPTIMAL HAND EVALUATION – FOREWORD

However, most experts agree that we can generally rely on the widely acknowledged accuracy of M. Work's 4 3 2 1 honor point count to evaluate balanced hands for a No Trump contract.

But then, how do we account for the 6 NT contract which should be bid with the hands below totaling only 27 honor points, when it is generally considered that a minimum of 33 HCP points (High Card Points) are needed for a 6 NT slam :

♠ A x x	♠ x x
♥ x x	♥ A x x
♦ K x x	♦ A Q J x x
♣ A Q x x x	♣ K x x

Even adding 1 point for the 5 clubs and another for the 5 diamonds only brings the total up to 29 HL points – far below 33 points !

Here again, we should have found by now a more accurate hand evaluation method that correctly assesses the *combined* value of these two hands at 35 total pts – Honor, Length and Fit points.

And then there is the matter of the value of Tens – generally ignored, particularly for suit contracts. As an example of this, take the deal below, from a tournament where not a single pair found the 4 ♠ game :

♠ A J 10 x x	♠ K x x
♥ K Q x	♥ J x
♦ Q x x x	♦ A J 10 x
♣ x	♣ x x x x

The bidding was invariably :

1 ♠	2 ♠
Pass	

But an **optimal** point count will show that East's hand is worth 12 HLD Fit points, not 9 or 10. The bidding could then be :

1 ♠	2 ♦
4 ♣ (♦ Fit, ♣ singleton)	4 ♠

The above is clearly a case where each ten is of significant value – counting the appropriate value of tens is of critical importance to reaching the right contracts. Here again, the traditional point count gives these two hands a total of only 23 HDS points when they actually total 29 HLDFit points.

And accurately evaluating the *combined* value of two hands ought to start with properly assessing the value of a *single* hand.

Yet, the 4 3 2 1 honor point count gives the two opening hands below the same count of 13 H pts when the first hand has 2 ½ winning tricks, with only one sure trick, while the second hand has more than 3 ½ winning tricks, with three sure tricks :

♠ K x x x	♠ A Q 10 x
♥ K x x	♥ x x x
♦ Q J x	♦ A K x x
♣ A 10 x	♣ x x

A more appropriate and accurate hand evaluation point count would give the first hand **12** points and the second **15** points.

Yet, to obtain a very precise, **optimal** hand evaluation, all that was needed was to apply corrections identified long ago and some **new ones** involving just a few more corrections to make to a point count already very familiar to all.

That is precisely what this book proposes to do and illustrate.

In the process, this **optimal** hand evaluation also addresses how to precisely evaluate *misfitted* hands – a key issue generally ignored and not precisely quantified. The following deal illustrates this : in the Final of a 1981 National selection, 3 teams out of four played 3 NT, down 2, after East's 2 ♣ response to West's 1 ♥ opening :

♠ x x	♠ Q x x
♥ A J 10 x x	♥ Q
♦ K x x x	♦ Q J x x
♣ K x	♣ A Q x x x

But East's hand, far from being worth 13 H/14 HL pts, should be counted for less than 10 HL *misfit* pts, which makes a 2 ♣ response inappropriate. A 1 NT response, instead, would have enabled the teams to settle in 3 ♦.

This book includes many examples of the disastrous consequences of the inadequate point count universally used today as well as the significant benefits of a very accurate **optimal** point count.

Finally, an **Optimal** hand evaluation has *implications* that greatly impact some bidding principles and practices. These implications are outlined in this book's *Epilogue*.





## CHAPTER 1

## GOREN'S Point Count : First Corrections

## ASSESSING CURRENT HAND EVALUATION PRACTICES

Assessing as accurately as possible the *combined* value of two hands of the same side is the very foundation of Bridge bidding and has therefore been, understandably, the subject of substantial study leading to various suggested hand evaluation methods from the very beginning of Contract Bridge, over 90 years ago.

But neither E. Culbertson's honor **trick** count (assessing the *trick-taking potential* of various honor combinations), nor the **3 2 1 ½** honor **point** count (for the Ace, King, Queen, Jack) advocated by the formidable « 4 Aces » American team in the mid-'30s, was adopted by players; the former, because it was complex, inaccurate and found ill-suited to evaluate evenly-distributed hands for a No Trump contract; the latter, because it involves counting in *half*-points (the Jack) and dividing by two the total number of points in order to estimate the probable number of tricks that can be expected.

Instead, the count which prevailed, from the mid-'30s in Great Britain and the mid-'40s in the United States, has been the **4 3 2 1** **honor** point count (for the Ace, K, Q, J) pioneered early on by Milton Work, later coupled with the Distribution point count for short suits (3, 2, 1 points for void, singleton, doubleton, 5, 3, 1 pts for the same short suits in a hand with a 4-card trump fit), popularized by Charles Goren – a count universally adopted because of its apparent *simplicity* and its *relative* overall accuracy.

But this claimed overall accuracy is neither sufficient nor satisfactory, and not just for competitive tournament Bridge, and several elements of the M. Work/C. Goren point count have been challenged for some time – and justifiably so – by several champions and experts. In particular, they challenged the value it attributes to Aces (considered *under*-valued) and to Queens and Jacks (considered *over*-valued, particularly when isolated, i.e. when not in combination with other honors).

Furthermore, it also fails to adequately account for the appropriate value of *Fits* and *Misfits* between two hands of the same side – to mention just its most important weaknesses.

Fortunately, from now on, we will no longer have to remain handicapped by the many, serious inaccuracies of the M. Work/ C. Goren point count as we only need to make a few corrections to this count to obtain **optimal** accuracy in hand evaluation – as illustrated hereafter.

## 1. FIRST CORRECTIONS TO MAKE TO GOREN'S POINT COUNT

Among the champions and experts having advocated, over the years, several adjustments to make to the M. Work/C. Goren point count, the French statistician **J-R. Vernes** has conducted the most substantial statistical research identifying key specific adjustments required (his major contribution in this area not being well known because his work was not translated into English).

It is his statistical findings that will be used throughout this book as the most scientifically reliable reference concerning hand evaluation. Many of the adjustments advocated by **M. Bergen**, **L. Cohen**, and **D. Kleinman**, to name only three prominent American experts and champions who published books on the topic of hand evaluation, correspond to J-R. Vernes' conclusions in several areas.

It is within the framework of his scientific research on competitive bidding – which led him to conceive the *Law of Total Tricks*, universally known today since the publication of his findings in English, in 1992, by the American champion Larry Cohen – that J-R. Vernes indicated, in 1966, in « *Bridge Moderne de la Défense* » / *Modern competitive bidding (my translation as the book was never translated into English)*, that several corrections to the traditional point count were in order, as follows :

### A) Concerning the 4 3 2 1 honor point count :

- *Aces, particularly in suit contracts, have a statistical value closer to 4 ½ points than to 4 points and, on the other hand, one point should be deducted from a hand without a single Ace.*
- *10s have some value, particularly at No Trump contracts, which can be estimated at ½ point for two 10s.*
- *In suit contracts, secondary honors, Queens and Jacks, in suits other than the trump suit, are worth half a point less than the 2 points and 1 point attributed to them by the 4 3 2 1 count.*

– Any honor located in a short suit – singleton or doubleton – is worth less than the 4 3 2 1 count attributed to them and should be downgraded as follows :

A singleton honor is worth **one point less** than its normal value – and this applies to Aces as well as they lose, when singletons, two of their major attributes : enhancing other honors and acting as defensive control (hand blockage).

Queens and Jacks, when located in a doubleton, are worth **half a point less** than their normal value.

1 point should be **deducted** for two honors doubleton when one of these honors is not a Jack (as A J is worth more than A x, and K J more than K x).

### **B) Concerning the 3 2 1 Distribution point count :**

– Long suits of 6 cards are underrated by one point : they are worth 2 pts for length rather than 1 point only. And balanced 5 3 3 2 and 6 3 2 2 single-suit hands are worth, respectively, 1 point and 2 points for length whether played in NT or in a suit contract.

*Author's note* : In practice, these points for length should only be counted when the 5 or 6-card suit is headed by at least Q J or K – at least 3 honor pts – to avoid over-evaluating the suit length when finding partner short in that suit.

This seems validated by John Thomas' statistical analysis which revealed, in 2001, that 68 % of borderline 3 NT contracts (24 H pts) succeed when the hands have a 5-card suit headed by at least Q J but only 10 % do when the 5-card suit has less than 3 H pts.

– 5 4 3 1 hands have an average distribution value of 2 pts but this is only a theoretical statistical average as a value of 2 pts is never found in any specific case : this distribution is, in fact, worth either 1 point for NT contracts or 3 pts in suit contracts.

– Statistics show that the distributional value of a 4 4 3 2 hand is **nil**; therefore, 1 distribution point should **not** be counted for a doubleton. And, relative to a 4 4 3 2 distribution, 4 3 3 3 hands have a **negative** distribution value – of at least **half a point**.

*Author's note* : An important correction to this last comment is in order : it is one whole point, and not just half a point, which must be deducted for a 4 3 3 3 distribution.

– A singleton is always a weakness when playing No Trump and at least 1 point must be **deducted** when proposing a NT contract.

2. CORRECTION TO THE 5 3 1 COUNT FOR DISTRIBUTION-FIT POINTS

Last but not least, concerning distribution points in a hand with a trump fit (8-card fit minimum) in partner's suit, J-R. Vernes makes the following comment in his 1966 book *Modern competitive bidding* : « the proper count of distribution points by the hand having a trump fit is probably the bidding issue treated in the most approximate fashion. Statistics show that the distributional value of a short suit in a hand with a trump fit varies depending upon the number of trumps held by that hand as it is dependant on two variables : on one hand, the number of cards in the short suit (void, singleton or doubleton) and, on the other hand, the number of trumps (2, 3, 4 or 5) allowing one or several ruffs. In practice, the Distribution-Fit point count rule should be the following : the hand having fewer trumps (trump support) should count its distribution points as the **difference** between the number of **trumps** held by that hand and the number of cards it holds in its **shortest** suit ».

Applying this rule translates as follows for each specific case :

- In a hand with 2-card trump support : a doubleton counts for 0 point (2 - 2), a singleton for 1 point (2 - 1), a void for 2 pts (2 - 0).
- In a hand with 3-card trump support : a doubleton counts for 1 point (3 - 2), a singleton for 2 pts (3 - 1), a void for 3 pts (3 - 0).
- In a hand with 4-card trump support : a doubleton counts for 2 pts (4 - 2), a singleton for 3 pts (4 - 1), a void for 4 pts (4 - 0).

**Caution** : This calculation does **not** apply to a hand having 5 trump cards as these 5 cards would not constitute trump support – they would be the long side of the suit, whether Partner has 4 or 5 cards in that suit. Therefore, that hand should only count the distribution pts that apply to an opening hand i.e. 2 pts for a singleton, **not** the difference between 5 trumps and the short suit. The following table recaps the above mentioned values :

<b>Number of trumps in Fit support</b> .....	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>DISTRIBUTION-FIT POINTS</b>			
<b>Void</b> ....	4 pts	3 pts	2 pts
<b>Singleton</b> ....	3 pts	2 pts	1 pt
<b>Doubleton</b> ....	2 pts	1 pt	0 pt

As the above table shows, the traditional 5 3 1 distribution point count for, respectively, void, singleton, doubleton in a hand with a 4-card trump support is **not accurate** : a doubleton in a hand with 4-card support is worth 2 pts, not 1. A *significant difference*, as many examples in this book will show.

The traditional 5 3 1 distribution point count must be replaced by the 4 3 2/ 3 2 1/ 2 1 0 count shown above. But there is no need to memorize it : only count the *difference* between the number of trumps and the number of cards in the support hand's *shortest suit*.

*Note* : These Distribution-Fit points must be counted in addition to the points attributed for long suits (1 point for a 5-card suit, 2 pts for a 6-card suit, etc.), to the points attributed for fits (covered in the next section) and to the points attributed for honors in a fit.

Clearly, these conclusions were significant and most of them are generally acknowledged by a majority of experts who factor them in, in actual play, as *pluses* or *minuses* when evaluating their hand – yet without quantifying them as precisely as above.

Actually, we continue to observe, far too often still, that more than 50 years after these conclusions were reached, most of them have yet to be systematically taught or integrated. Perhaps, some may argue, for “*teaching simplicity*” with regard to the everyday player of intermediate skills ?

But this would hardly be credible in view of the ever-increasing number of new, complex conventions that spring up everyday and which are taught with abandon to these same players...

In reality, these undeniable conclusions are, generally, still not reflected in the comments made by experts and champions in Bridge books or magazines, and neither are they applied by champions in actual bidding at the bridge table as numerous examples in this book will show.

But before forging further ahead, we need to bring greater precision to the first three conclusions reached by J-R. Vernes, identified above, with regard to the values of Aces, Queens, Jacks and tens.

### 3. THE TRUE VALUE OF ACES, QUEENS AND JACKS.

**1. The value of Aces.** Each Ace must, in fact, be counted in **all** cases 4 ½ pts, not 4 pts, and this applies to **all** contracts, including No Trump contracts.

That is a fact which has been largely documented and validated for over 40 years now, starting with B. Charles' statistical work published in 1976, later confirmed, in the '80s, by an American computer analysis. Both studies were conducted over thousands of hands played in international championships and evaluating tricks *actually made* at the table by Aces, Kings, Queens and Jacks.

Their findings were very similar and can be combined as follows :

At NT, the Ace makes, on average, 1.78 \* tricks and the King 1.24 tricks. This, whatever the point scale used, gives the Ace a value that is 44 % greater than that of the King. Relative to a King valued at 3 pts, an Ace is therefore worth, on average, 4.3 pts at NT.

*Author's note : not only is 4.5 closer to 4.3 than 4 pts is, but the discrepancy grows with more Aces : as 9 pts for 2 Aces is much closer to 8.6 pts (2 x 4.3) than 8 pts is and 13.5 pts for 3 Aces is much closer to 12.9 pts (3 x 4.3) than 12 pts is.*

*\* The Ace and the King generate more than 1 trick each because of their "control" feature, whether offensive or defensive. One example is the typical defensive move, at a NT contract, to hold up the Ace until the third round of a lead in a 5-card suit to cut communications between opponents and prevent a subsequent run of that suit, thus avoiding the loss of two tricks. Another is the orientation of a finesse, with, for example, K 10 x opposite A J x, to prevent a return from the wrong side in another suit guarded only by a King, thus avoiding losing more tricks.*

*Furthermore, the Ace has trick-generating value, beyond its trick-taking value; for example : A x x x x facing K x will likely generate a third trick – and possibly a fourth trick, as well (whenever the missing six cards are distributed 3 – 3).*

*And the same trick-generating value applies to the King, as well; for example, while Q J 10 x by itself may not generate any trick, facing K x it will now produce three tricks.*

*This totally debunks E. Culbertson's honor **trick** count which gives the Ace credit for only one trick-taking value and the King credit for only ½ trick when by itself.*

And in a **suit** contract, the Ace generates, on average (weighted average between its trump value and its value in suits other than the trump suit), 1.34 \* tricks and the King 0.88 \* tricks. the Ace then has a value that is 54 % greater than that of the King. Thus, relative to a King valued at 3 pts, an Ace is therefore worth, on average, 4.6 pts in a suit contract.

*\* In a suit contract, the value of honors is reduced by the distribution values provided by short suits allowing ruffs, the eventual establishment of small cards in long suits, etc.*

*Author's note : here, the error of counting only 4 pts per Ace becomes very serious as 9 pts for 2 Aces is much closer to 9.2 pts than 8 pts is, and 13.5 pts for 3 Aces is much closer to 13.8 pts than 12 pts is.*

The conclusion is clear : the Ace is worth, on average, 50 % more than the King and must therefore be counted 4 ½ pts, not 4 pts, regardless of the hand distribution or the contract played, NT or in a suit. And that is what the great American « 4 Aces » team had understood very early and reflected in their 3 2 1 ½ count.

And for those who would rather avoid counting each Ace 4 ½ pts, an alternative is to add 1 point for a second Ace and another for a 4th Ace i.e. two Aces = 9 pts, four Aces = 18 pts.

**2. The value of Queens and Jacks.** The conclusion on the lesser value of Queens and Jacks for suit contracts has not been translated in practice and what some experts advocate (add 1 point to hands having **no** Queen or Jack, deduct 1 point from hands having four or more Queens and /or Jacks) has generally not been adopted – *and rightly so as this is without statistical foundation.*

In fact, the same statistical research referred to above establishes the King and the Queen average values as, respectively, 3.15 pts and 1.75 pts, which means that the King's value is, on average, 70 % greater than that of the Queen. But, just like 2 pts is a purely *theoretical* statistical average for 5 4 3 1 distributions, so are the values of 1.75 and 0.75 pts for Queens and Jacks which, in practice, are *never found in any specific case !*

Indeed, unlike Aces, which essentially keep the same value, offensive or defensive, whether isolated or not, the value of Queens and Jacks *varies* depending upon *whether or not* they are accompanied by other honors.

And the fact that Queens and Jacks have a lesser value when isolated has often been pointed out by experts and champions and can easily be illustrated :

The honor combination : K Q x x x x will produce two tricks whenever the Ace in that suit is located before K Q – that's 50 % of the time. While the combination : K x x x Q x x will very rarely produce more than one single trick.

The same applies to several other combinations, such as :

A Q x x	x x x	compared to :	A x x x	Q x x
Q J x x	x x x	compared to :	Q x x x	J x x
A Q J x	x x x	compared to :	A J x x	Q x x
A K J x	x x x	compared to :	A K x x	J x x
A Q 10 x	x x x	compared to :	A 10 x x	Q x x
K Q 10 x	x x x	compared to :	K 10 x x	Q x x

The difference in value between *isolated* Queens and Jacks and *accompanied* Queens and Jacks can be estimated to be, on average, about about **half** a point. The Queen's value therefore varies from 1.5 to 2 pts while the Jack's value varies from 0.5 to 1 point.

This variation of *half a point* translates precisely the well known "synergy" principle : *Touching honors are worth more than separated honors*, and, particularly, the Q J x combination in the same suit, doubles-up on the upgrade by 1 full point.

As a result, giving the Queen and Jack their average statistical value – of 1.75 pts and 0.75 pts respectively – would not only be totally impractical, it would be seriously *erroneous* and *misguided*. Just as is giving them a *fixed, constant* value of 2 pts and 1 point which makes the King worth only 50 % more than the Queen.

This has considerable practical consequences which many examples in this book will illustrate.

The proper count is therefore : Queens and Jacks, are indeed worth 2 points and 1 point, respectively, *when accompanied by another honor*, but are only worth 1 ½ and ½ points *when isolated* – and this holds true whether playing NT or a suit contract !

And, here again, an alternative to counting in *half-points* is to count 3 pts for 2 isolated Queens or 1 point for 2 isolated Jacks.

**3. The value of tens.** To attribute a value of ½ point for two tens is another serious error – as the value of each ten *varies considerably* depending upon whether it is isolated or accompanies a King, a Queen or a Jack. This is very important and we will establish, later on, the "true" value of each ten.

A preliminary summary, on the next page, recaps these initial corrections to make to the *traditional* point count.





**CORRECTIONS TO GOREN'S POINT COUNT : EXAMPLE DEALS**

1986 World championships.

In his 1995 book, « *Evaluation of Bridge hands* », J-R. Vernes makes the following comment based on his analysis of deals played in world championships from 1980 to 1989 :

« *One is struck by the very high number of bad contracts reached (20 %), often due to an inadequate hand evaluation* ». He gives the following example (1986), among many others, as illustration :

♠ A J x	♠ x x x
♥ K J x	♥ Q x x x
♦ A K x x	♦ Q x x
♣ A x x	♣ J x x

At both tables, the bidding was :

2 NT (20/21 H pts) 3 NT

*Down one.* East bids 3 NT as he counts his hand for 5 points.

But East's hand is only worth 2 ½ pts, not 5 : 3 pts for its two isolated Queens, ½ point for its isolated Jack, minus 1 point for its 4 3 3 3 distribution. And another point could be deducted for having no Ace and no King. East should have *passed* on 2 NT.

Topic : « *Technique* ». Le Bridgeur, 2008.

♠ Q x	♠ K x x
♥ A x x x	♥ Q J x
♦ A K J	♦ Q x x
♣ x x x x	♣ Q J x x

The bidding was : 1 ♣ 2 NT (11/12 H)  
3 NT

Comment : « *A perfectly normal contract – but, still, a very bad one...* ».

In fact, far from having 11 pts, East only has 9 ½ pts. The isolated ♦ Q is only worth one and a half point, not 2, and one point must be deducted for East's 4 3 3 3 distribution.

The proper count therefore calls for a 1 NT response, limited to 10 pts, not 2 NT. On which West would then *pass* as he only has 14 pts (only one point for his doubleton ♠ Q).

**CORRECTIONS TO GOREN'S POINT COUNT : EXAMPLE DEALS**

National selection, Teams, 2008.

♠ J x x	♠ A x x
♥ Q x x	♥ K x x
♦ A K x x	♦ Q x x
♣ K J x	♣ Q x x x

The bidding was often : 1 ♦ or 1 NT (12/14) 2 NT (11/12)  
3 NT

East, counting his hand for 11 pts, proposes to play 3 NT to an opener having a maximum hand of 14 pts.

But, far from having 11 pts, East only has 9 ½ pts, with two isolated Queens and a 4 3 3 3 distribution. It is 1 NT (or *pass* on a weak 1 NT opening) which should be bid, not 2 NT. West further contributes to overreaching to 3 NT by counting his own hand for 14 pts when it only has 12 ½ pts: isolated Queen and Jack and 4 3 3 3 distribution.

Confirmation that 4 3 3 3 distributions are handicaps, in NT or in suit contracts, and *must always* be downgraded by one full point.

Regional tournament, (U.K.), 2010.

♠ A K x	♠ J x x
♥ J x x	♥ A x x
♦ Q x x	♦ A x x x
♣ Q x x x	♣ A x x

The bidding was often : 1 NT (12/14 H) 3 NT

A perfectly normal 3 NT bid from East with its 13 pts (4 3 3 3), facing an opener guaranteeing a minimum of 12 H pts.

But West only has 10 pts ! 4 3 3 3 distribution (- 1) and the isolated Queens and Jack are worth a total of 3 ½ pts, not 5. The bidding should have been :

Pass	1 NT (12/14 H)
Pass	

European Open, 2011.

♠ A Q x	♠ K
♥ A K x x	♥ J 10 x x
♦ 10 x x x	♦ K J x
♣ A x	♣ x x x x x

## CORRECTIONS TO GOREN'S POINT COUNT : EXAMPLE DEALS

In both rooms, West opened 1 NT - which was *passed* by one team.

But West has 18 ½ pts (3 Aces at 4 ½ pts each), not 17, and therefore should not open 1 NT. On a 1 ♦ (or a strong Club) opening, finding the game in hearts should not be difficult :

1 ♦	1 ♥
3 ♥ (17/19 HDS)	4 ♥

East has 11 HDFit pts (2 pts for the ♠ K singleton + 3 pts for the ♠ singleton with 4 trumps + 1 point for the Jack in the trump suit) + 17 HLDF minimum in the West hand = 28 pts.

One last comment to conclude this segment : how many times have we read, in Bridge books, references made to “strong” 17 pts or “weak” 15 pts such as : « *Do not open 1 NT, 15/17, the following two hands* » :

♠ Q x x	♠ A K x
♥ K Q x	♥ Q J x
♦ Q J x	♦ K x
♣ K Q x x	♣ A x x x x

« *The first one is « a very poor 15 points » (no Ace, lots of Queens and Jacks), the second is « a very strong 17 points » (lots of Aces and Kings)*”.

Unfortunately, such approximations are not accurately quantified and only serve to perpetuate the perception that only experts are capable of properly assessing the true value of their hands – when the reality is that “expert judgment” is not needed to assess *strong* or *weak* hands : an accurate point count will do just that !

The first hand is worth 12 ½ pts (minus 1 point for being 4 3 3 3, minus 1 point for no Ace, and 1 ½ point for the isolated ♠ Q), and the second one is worth 19 pts (9 pts for 2 Aces + 1 for the 5 clubs). Opening either hand 1 NT, 15/17, *won't even cross your mind...*

Actually, even the greatest champions seem to have problems judging their hands properly – as illustrated by the following hand, from the final of a 2012 national open, teams, opened 1 NT, 12/14, by the Italian pair **Nunes** and **Fantoni**, multiple world champions :

♠ A x x
♥ x x x
♦ A x
♣ K Q J x x

## CORRECTIONS TO GOREN'S POINT COUNT : EXAMPLE DEALS

This hand should be counted for 16 HL pts, not 14 H pts.  
Wouldn't you *pass* on such a weak 1NT opening with the following hand ? Instead of playing 3 NT :

♠ K x x  
♥ x x x  
♦ K 10 x x  
♣ A x x

These few examples show that to obtain a point count a little more precise, and more accurate, it would be helpful to start by applying to the 4 3 2 1 point count the very basic corrections identified as far back as 1966 and accept to count in *half*-points – which, unfortunately, neither J-R. Vernes himself nor the majority of experts have seen fit to adopt and advocate just to keep the point count as “simple” as possible.

Perhaps as a compassionate gesture toward the average or intermediate players ?! The same players to whom experts have tried to teach a multitude of complex conventions intended to compensate for the appalling lack of precision of most bidding systems played and advocated.

Ironic – or rather a very regrettable error of judgment which has only resulted in delaying by several decades the precise evaluation of Bridge hands. How unfortunate.

## ACCURATELY ASSESS THE VALUE OF YOUR *COMBINED* HANDS

Accurate hand evaluation is critically important to reaching the right contract in bridge. Yet, for over 75 years now, hand evaluation has essentially relied on Milton Work's 4-3-2-1 honor point count — a count known to be seriously flawed and inaccurate. Even in balanced hands aces are under-valued, queens and jacks are over-valued when isolated, tens are not factored in, and distribution and fit are not accounted for.

All in all, this method gives a very unsatisfactory, inaccurate point count that leads, too often, to the wrong contract.

In this book, the author addresses these flaws by applying corrections to the 4-3-2-1 honor point count and Goren's distribution point count, and introduces revolutionary new findings that lead to much more accurate hand evaluation. Most importantly, this new Optimal hand evaluation accurately assesses the value of both hands combined, the true test of hand evaluation.

Over 100 example hands clearly establish that the Work/Goren point count is simply erroneous and that various other more modern point counts do not offer a better alternative.

Reading this book will let you be the judge, and applying the Optimal point count is sure to substantially improve your bidding.

**PATRICK DARRICADES** (Canada) learned to play bridge as a teenager, but quickly became more interested in the theory of the game rather than in playing it. His studies of the statistical work of J-R. Vernes (which formed the basis for the Law of Total Tricks) led to his work on hand evaluation, and the present book.

