

Here comes the sun

By Migry Zur Campanile

Here we are: we learnt the basics of bidding, we added some useful conventions to our repertoire, we don't usually drop too many tricks in defense and our declarer play is reasonable.

So what is stopping us? Why do we feel that the good players we face at the club always seem to do the right thing against us?

Yes, experience may have something to do with it and naturally it may in some cases be simply a matter of talent or superior knowledge but when and how can we hope to overcome the obstacles which are holding up our game?

There are three very important things which we must learn and practise when we play:

- 1) **Count !**
- 2) **Count !!**
- 3) **Count !!!**

Yes .. I mean count points, count tricks, count cards... always, forever...COUNT !! It may not be easy, especially at first when we are not so used to it, it may even seem at times an impossible task to master within the usual time constraints of your average club tournament, but I can guarantee you that it is the most assured way to let the sun shine over your game.

You will feel like you have entered a new, brighter, world: things will suddenly become much clearer thanks to the enhanced understanding that you will have over most situations that before had you baffled. The first huge help we get to assist us on the way to a good result is the bidding: as soon as that dummy hits the table we should turn our mental calculator on and get counting!

Someone opened the bidding? Let's give him at least 12 points. Someone passed as dealer? He doesn't have 12 points. Did he pass his partner's opening? He has less than 6 points. It all seems so simple and obvious and yet it is very common for players to forget these basic facts during the play. Look what happens to the declarer in this hand:

♠ K54 ♥ 742 ♦ A543 ♣ KQ2	N W E S	♠ A9 ♥ 965 ♦ 10762 ♣ 10973
♠ 63 ♥ AQJ1083 ♦ K9 ♣ 865		

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	Pass	2♥
2♠	4♥	All Pass	

West leads the ♠Q, which is ducked all round, and continues with the ♠J. Again our declarer ducks confidently and nods happily to himself when he sees East take over his partner's ♠J with the ♠A. Back comes the ♣10, taken by West with the ♣A, who returns the ♠10 for the ♠K in dummy, ruffed by East and overruffed by South. Three tricks have gone, that means we must not concede the ♥K if we want to make our contract. Our declarer knows very well how to play a suit with the K missing. He quickly gets to dummy with a club and plays a heart to the ♥J, finessing the missing monarch. Unfortunately, the ♥K appears on his left and the contract is one down. Our declarer, looking around for sympathy, complains of his bad luck when he played the percentages by going for the finesse. But is it really a matter of bad luck or bad play?

We know that West has opened while East passed out his partner's 1♠ bid. That surely places him with less than 6 points. So when we see that he holds the ♠A, we can for sure place the ♥K with West. Our only legitimate chance to capture the ♥K and make our contract is to find it singleton and that's what we should play for, regard-

less of what the statistics would make us do in a different and less clear position. If the ♥K is indeed singleton, the careful declarer will receive the reward he deserves for having counted the points that the bidding assigned to each player.

Let us move to another hand and see if counting can help us there too:

♠ J1076 ♥ J84 ♦ KJ92 ♣ A5	N W E S	♠ 8 ♥ Q1065 ♦ Q76 ♣ 87643
♠ AQ932 ♥ 93 ♦ A105 ♣ KQ2		

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♥A and continues with the ♥K and another heart, ruffed in hand. Declarer goes to dummy with the ♣A and finesses the ♠J losing to West's ♠K. The ♣J comes back, taken in hand and after two more rounds of trumps we arrive at the crucial moment where we must guess the position of the ♦Q to make our game. But is it really a guess?

Well, it is for those who do not know how to count and forget the bidding: West passed initially and yet showed up already with ♥A and ♥K, ♠K and ♣J. Unless he is very shy by nature, he cannot possibly have the ♦Q too as that would give him a total of 13 points.

So our declarer can confidently place the ♦Q in East and play accordingly, thus making his contract.

To recap: correct, meticulous counting is a sure way to improve one's game and keeping in mind those very important numbers, obtained from analyzing the bidding, can help us an awful lot in making decisions that to others will seem inspired but that, in reality, are as easy as adding up 2 and 2.