

37 POINTS

Bridge theorists have proposed a variety of point-counts, including Edgar Kaplan's "Four C's" (October 1982 *Bridge World*), a modification of the "Four Aces Count" (originally 6-4-2-1) to 4½-3-1½-¾-¼, and my own (based loosely on a transformation of scale that takes Doug Bennion's 13-9-5-2 count as its starting point). Each count, however, must use the same scale as the popular 4-3-2-1 count to be commensurable with it and hence understandable by users and opponents alike. One test of commensurability is that ♠AKQ ♥AKQ ♦AKQ ♣AKQJ must count to 37 HCP.

Can we develop a point-count for *suit quality*? Such a count would be useful for many purposes: judging when a suit is good enough for a Weak Two-Bid or other preempt, an overcall with marginal strength or in a four-card suit, opening four-card majors (especially in third or fourth seat), making supposedly two-suited calls with only four cards in one of the suits, and so forth. Each situation may call for a different threshold, a different number of suit-quality points being needed to make the suit a "good" suit in context.

The "number of points" in the suit (which Edgar Kaplan and Jeff Rubens called "suit quality" in their "Four C's" article) won't do; although the size of the honor-cards is relevant to suit quality, the number of honor-cards should be taken into account, and so should high spot-cards.

After some reflection, I decided to create a suit-quality count in which the ratio of the value of higher honors to lower is less than in point-counts such as the Four Aces Count (6-4-2-1) and Doug Bennion's Count (13-9-5-2). Although lower spot-cards are sometimes significant, I'm especially respectful of *the eight of trumps*, so I've taken it as the unit of measure, a unit that I've named the *berry* in honor of Berry Westra.

Here is my proposal for the count. Unlike some other counts (such as Quick Tricks, Honor Tricks, the "Four C's" Count, and Doug Bennion's Count), the suit quality count is designed to be purely additive, not synergistic. However, one merit of the "Four C's" Count is that it recognizes the diminishing importance of lower cards that get "swallowed up" by top honors as the suit becomes longer. My measure of suit quality will also vary with the length of the suit.

The basic count applies to suits of six cards or fewer. I have chosen a count that separates good spot-cards from low honors, and further separates *key cards* from *low honors*.

However, for each card in a suit beyond six, I shall adjust the basic count for the "swallowing" that occurs. The total count for each length shall be constant, 37 berries, but for lengths shorter than 10, no suit will attain the maximum because *only the four highest cards in the suit shall be counted*.

<u>SUIT LENGTH</u>	8-spot	9-spot	10-spot	jack	queen	king	ace	maximum
4-6	1	2	4	5	6	9	10	30
7		1	3	5	6	9	13	33
8			2	4	6	9	16	35
9			1	3	5	9	19	36
10					4	8	25	37
11						6	31	37
12							37	37

The basic count, for suits of lengths 4, 5 and 6, is easy to derive and therefore to remember. Start with the lowest spot-card counted and increment by 1, skipping 1 berry between the high spot-cards and the honors, and 2 berries between the lower honors and the keys-cards.

Swallowing commences when the suit length exceeds 6. For the next three suit lengths, 7, 8 and 9, *the ace gains 3 berries* with each increment of length, and *each of the three lowest cards counted loses 1 berry*. For the last three lengths, 10, 11 and 12, *the ace gains 6 berries* with each increment of length, and each of the lowest cards counted loses berries in compensation.

What is a "good suit"? All is relevant to the bidding context and dependent on partnership agreements. For suits of lengths 4, 5 and 6, I personally require at least 18 berries to qualify as "good," but you are free to use the scale to set different standards.

Of course *in support of partner's suit*, the length to be used is the *expected combined length*. Thus ♠KQJ109 in support of partner's 1♠ opening counts as 12 berries (not 24), reflecting the condition commonly known as *trump richness*.