

A MORE ACCURATE POINT-COUNT

The September 2001 *Bridge World* contains a letter from Doug Bennion of Toronto that defines a new point-count, *Little Jack Points* (LJP), as $A = 6\frac{1}{2}$, $K = 4\frac{1}{2}$, $Q = 2\frac{1}{2}$ and $J = 1$, which Bennion's research confirms as being superior to the usual 4-3-2-1 provided an adjustment is made for honor synergy: add $\frac{1}{2}$ for any two of these cards working together in the same suit *except* a queen-jack combination.

You may notice that (a) $\spadesuit A92 \heartsuit K8 \diamondsuit J743 \clubsuit Q653$, a seemingly "average" hand, contains $14\frac{1}{2}$ LJP. That won't do, for one of the points of using point-count is to have a *common unit of measure* that partners and opponents can understand. If you're filling out a convention card that has a space for the range of a 1NT response to $1\clubsuit$, it is unacceptable to write " $11\frac{1}{2}$ to $14\frac{1}{2}$ LJP" (the approximate equivalent of the standard "8 to 10" HCP).

To create the necessary commensurability, we might transform the scales, multiplying all values by $10/14\frac{1}{2}$ and rounding to the nearest tenth. This yields the count: $A = 4.5$, $K = 3.1$, $Q = 1.7$ and $J = 0.7$, *all in HCP terms*.

However, we can do better still.

(1) Double all of Bennion's values, producing $A = 13$, $K = 9$, $Q = 5$, $J = 2$ and whole-point adjustments instead of halves. Now the "average" hand appears to contain 29 of the new points.

(2) Notice that (a) is not an "average" hand but a poorer than average hand, an *atypical* "10 HCP" hand at that. The probability that a hand with one ace, one king, one queen and one jack has *no synergy points* turns out to be exactly the same as the probability that it has *two synergy points*. Therefore *on the average*, synergy adjustments give it 30 of the new points, not 29. A more typical "10 HCP" hand is (b) $\spadesuit A92 \heartsuit KJ84 \diamondsuit 73 \clubsuit Q653$.

(3) Restate the synergy adjustment as: *add 1 point for every picture-card that is accompanied by an ace or king*.

The changes introduced so far yield *Double LJP*. However, Bennion did not make some adjustments that I recommend to reflect my judgment, which is very close to the judgment of Edgar Kaplan as implemented in "Four C's" (*Bridge World*, October 1982). So, to reflect my judgment and Kaplan's more accurately:

* Add for 10s when *accompanied* by 9s or higher honors: add 1 for one such "companion" in the suit, 2 for two or more companions.

* Subtract 1 for any suit whose lowest card is higher than a 10.

* Subtract 1 for *unguarded picture-cards* (e.g. $\spadesuit K$, $\heartsuit Qx$ or $\diamondsuit Jxx$).

* Subtract 2 for a flat hand (4-3-3-3 distribution).

After making these adjustments (or any others you like) ...

(4) Divide the resulting count by 3 to get the equivalent HCP ("Kleinman Points" or "[Your] Points" depending on *which* adjustments you make) using the customary scale. If there's no remainder, you have a "bad" hand for its point-count, e.g. $45/3 =$ a "bad" 15 HCP. If the remainder is 1, you have an ordinary hand for its point-count, e.g. $46/3 =$ an ordinary 15 HCP. If the remainder is 2, you have a "good" hand for its point-count, e.g. $47/3 =$ a "good" 15 HCP. This terminology is consistent with the usage of "good" and "bad" for point-counts that we have seen in *The Bridge World* for decades (but may soon be changed to "weak" and "strong").

Bennion researched only the values of high cards *when balanced hand faces balanced hand*. So even when contemplating *notrump* bids, you should assign more weight to aces and less to queens and jacks ... to reflect their relative values in the suit contracts you may reach when *partner* has an *unbalanced* hand.

Does this point-count conform to the common scale for high-card points? To verify that it does, you might ask how many points it counts for a strongest-possible hand, $\spadesuit AKQ \heartsuit AKQ \diamondsuit AKQ \clubsuit AKQJ$ or any other hand with all the aces, kings and queens plus a jack. It should count 37 HCP.

Although I recommend that you learn to count points in your head (which will become second nature with practice), you can check your arithmetic by visiting the outstanding website of Jeff Goldsmith, <http://www.gg.caltech.edu/~jeff/>, clicking on [K&R Evaluator](#), and typing the 13 cards of a bridge hand. You will soon see not only my rating for the hand ("+" meaning "good" and "-" meaning "bad") but also Kaplan's.