

The Four Degrees of Counting



Lunch and Learn

Bentonville Regional Tournament

7/31/26

About Me

- Four NABC titles
- Active on BBO – username = Phil
- Emerald LM – LM at 22
- USBF Junior Mentor and Coach
- Member of Online Ethical Oversight Committee of ACBL and Advisory Council
- Non-Playing Captain, USA2 Seniors, Herning, DK (and now medalist!)
- Bridge World panelist and moderator of Challenge the Champs



Warm Up!

$$5 = 5 = 0 = ?$$

$$A = 3$$

$$1 = 4 = 2 = ?$$

$$A = 6$$

$$4 = 2 = 4 = ?$$

$$A = 3$$

$$8 = 1 = 1 = ?$$

$$A = 3$$

$$7 = 4 = 3 = ?$$

$$A = \text{Just Kidding}$$



A mistake I made!

- I counted my tricks! (seven diamonds in hand, two aces, two club ruffs in dummy = 11)
- I analyzed! If I take the heart finesse, I am down if it's off. But if I lead a spade to the K, I make it either the spade A or heart King are onside.
- Yet I got this wrong!



2

Dlr: East

Vul: None

Matchpoints

♠ K 6

♥ A Q J 7 6

♦ Q 9 8 4 3

♣ 2

♠ 5

♥ 4 3

♦ A K J 10 7 6 5

♣ A 10 8

West

North

East

South

3♠⁽¹⁾

5♦

1♣

1♦

Pass

6♦

All Pass

(1) Weak

A sad tale

I watched an up-and-coming player have trouble with this suit combination.

He cashed the AK and Q.

Both opponents followed to all three rounds. He didn't know if the 9 was good!

North	
♠	
♥	
♦	
♣	AK3
South	
♠	
♥	
♦	
♣	Q942

We have seven clubs between us. There are six out.

When both opponents follow to three rounds, all six cards have been played!

1st Lesson of counting:

- There are 13 cards in a suit
- There are 13 cards in a hand and 13 tricks in a deal
- There are 40 points in the deck

Similar theme

Let's try another.
This combination
looks familiar!

Trick 1: A, 5, 2, T

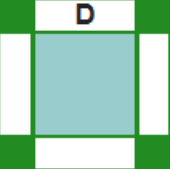
Trick 2: K, 6, 4, J

Trick 3: 3, 7, Q, ♦2

North
♠
♥
♦
♣ AK3
South
♠
♥
♦
♣ Q942

What's
happening
here?

**2nd Lesson of
counting:**
In addition to
counting, you
must **OBSERVE**
what is
happening at the
table

	North	
	♠	
	♥	
	♦ 4	
	♣ AK3	
West		East
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦ 32		♦
♣ J10		♣ 8765
	South	
	♠	
	♥	
	♦	
	♣ Q942	

One last time

One last time:

Trick 1: A, 5, 2, T

Trick 2: K, 6, 4, ♦2

North
♠
♥
♦
♣ AK3
South
♠
♥
♦
♣ Q942

And what's happening here?

3rd Lesson of counting:
You must be able to visualize the layout to effectively play and defend

	North	
	♠ ♥ ♦ 75 ♣ AK3	
West		East
♠ ♥ ♦ 8432 ♣ 10		♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ J8765
	South	
	♠ ♥ ♦ 6 ♣ Q942	

Well, maybe ONE more time (I promise!)

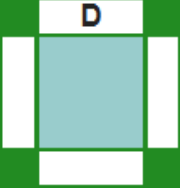
Trick 1: A, 6, 2, 5

Trick 2: K, 7, 4, T

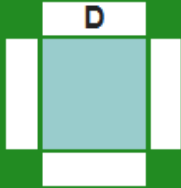
Now what's happening here?

There are two possible layouts:

A:

		
North	♠ ♥ ♦ 7 ♣ AK3	East
West	♠ ♥ ♦ 8 ♣ J105	♠ ♥ ♦ 5 ♣ 876
South	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ Q942	

B:

		
North	♠ ♥ ♦ 7 ♣ AK3	East
West	♠ ♥ ♦ 85 ♣ 105	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ J876
South	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ Q942	

4th Lesson of counting:
You must understand card play principles to play at the expert level

2

Dlr: East ♠ K 6
 Vul: None ♥ A Q J 7 6
 Matchpoints ♦ Q 9 8 4 3
 ♣ 2

 ♠ 5
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ A K J 10 7 6 5
 ♣ A 10 8

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♦
3♠ ⁽¹⁾	5♦	Pass	6♦

All Pass

(1) Weak

- How I should have approached this hand. While my technique was good, I didn't fully count.
- Let's count points. Dummy has 12, I have 12. There are (40-24) 16 outstanding.
- LHO seems to have the QJ of clubs (13 points left) and probably some spade honors for the 3S call. Did you *observe* this?
- RHO has the K of clubs and needs nine more points to have an opening bid.
- RHO MUST have the hK and the spade A.
- Can I do anything about this?

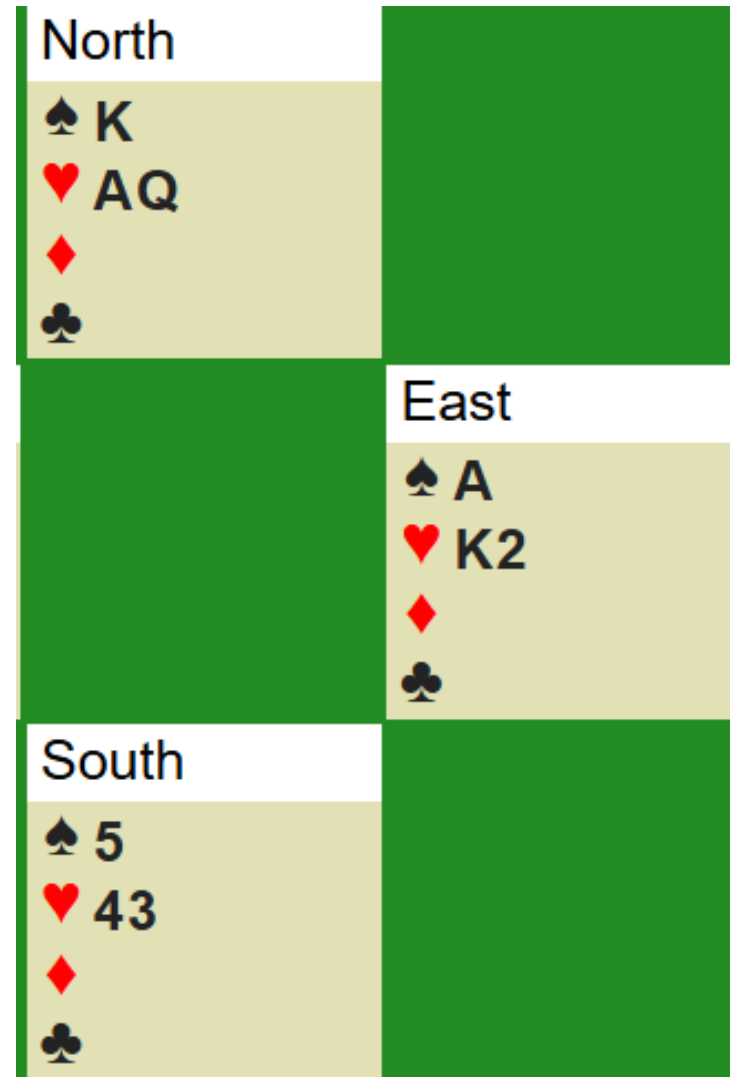
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Dlr: East ♠ K 6
 Vul: None ♥ A Q J 7 6
 Matchpoints ♦ Q 9 8 4 3
 ♣ 2

 ♠ 5
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ A K J 10 7 6 5
 ♣ A 10 8

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♣	1♦
3♠ ⁽¹⁾	5♦	Pass	6♦
All Pass			
(1) Weak			

- Ruff the clubs and run all of your trump and reduce to:



Learning points

- If you are ever going to master the game you must count: Shape, points and tricks. Many things in bridge add up to 13 – know the combinations by heart
- Beyond counting, you have to pay attention!
- Visualization and ‘seeing’ the other hands will often lead you to a winning line
- Learn technique and endplays, but if you cannot count and visualize, you won’t be effective.
- <https://bridgewinners.com/pages/counting-game>