

UPGRADING (AND DOWNGRADING) YOUR HAND

Bridge hands are not static. They can get better—and worse—as the auction progresses. You start with the high card points of your hand. If you find a fit with partner, add in distributional points. If the opponents enter the auction, the honors in your hand become well-placed or poorly placed.

Here are some of the **principles for your hand improving**:

- 1) Cards in suits bid by your partner (including implied in a take-out double) increase in value.
- 2) Kings increase in value if the suit is bid on your right; partner has bid no trump; or most of the strength rates to be on your right (based on the auction).
- 3) Queens and jacks become more valuable if partner bids the suit or bids no trump.
- 4) Aces are almost always good. (Only if partner shows a void in that suit does an ace go down in value.)
- 5) Cards in unbid suits are worth more than cards in suits that the opponents bid.
- 6) Once opponents have found a fit, length in their suit (with no honor cards) is probably opposite shortness in partner's hand, so you have no wasted values there.

Here are some of the **principles for your hand getting worse**:

- 1) Kings decrease in value when the suit is bid on your left; when most of the opponents' strength rates to be on your left; or when partner is known to be short in that suit.
- 2) Queens and jacks go down in value when the suit is bid by your opponents. They go down even more when the suit is bid on your left than on your right.
- 3) All secondary honors (kings, queens, jacks) go down in value when your partner is known to be very short in that suit.

As an example, suppose you open one spade and LHO overcalls one no trump. How well do you like each of the following hands?

Hand A

KJ765

KJ2

AJ3

Q4

This is a disaster waiting to happen. With most of the outstanding strength behind you, you would be lucky to make more than 3 or 4 tricks. Pass any subsequent bids & be happy to escape this hand!

15 HCP

Hand B

KJ1083

AQJ

K765

5

Your hand has lost some value. However, the reasonable spot cards in your trump suit offer some protection & you have some distributional values. A part-score is still possible.

14 HCP

Hand C

AJ10987

KQ104

QJ10

Your spot cards & distribution are so great that game is still possible. Be willing to bid again.

13 HCP

Example: RHO opens 1S and you pass with: A10xx 1087 KJx AJx. With only 13 HCP and only three hearts, a take-out double is rather aggressive. It goes pass by LHO and partner balances in with 2 hearts (should show 8-11 HCP). RHO then bids 3D. Your call?

I bid 4H. We made 5 and only one other pair was in game. My hand went **way up** in value: partner rates to be short in spades (he had 2); KJx of diamonds rate to take 2 tricks (they did); partner will either have good hearts or a secondary fit in clubs with me (he had King of clubs). We lost Ace & King of hearts & that is all. Partner had Ace of diamonds & finessed jack to discard a losing spade on the diamond king.