

WHEN *N O T* TO COUNT AT BRIDGE

by Maritha Pottenger

There are a number of hands in which it is unnecessary for Declarer to count anything (except tricks). And there are many hands in which Declarer only has to count a limited number of items. Here are the most common examples:

- 1) When you are going to **play on a cross-ruff**. If you intend to cross-ruff an entire hand (for maximum number of tricks), you do not have to count anything. Simply cash your side suit winners and proceed to cross-ruff. No need to count any suit distribution, high card points, etc. (You do have to count your tricks in the beginning of the hand to ascertain that a cross ruff is the way to go!)
- 2) Some hands, especially in no trump, depend solely on **whether or not certain cards** (usually honors) **drop**, and whether **various finesses succeed or fail**. When, for example, you are playing AKQ109 opposite xxx, you simply watch for whether or not the Jack drops. If you have three finesses to try, you don't have to count suit distribution, high card points, etc.
- 3) In a suit contract, if you are developing a long suit by trumping, you have to count **trump** and you have to count the **long suit**. You should also count the **entries** to the hand containing your long suit—to be sure that you have enough entries to develop the long suit AND get back and cash your winners once trump are pulled. You do **NOT** have to count the other two suits, or high cards, etc.
- 4) In a suit contract, if you are going to take a **ruffing finesse** in order to make your contract, you only have to **count trumps**.
- 5) In a suit contract, if you are going to **ruff in the short trump hand**, you need to **count trumps** in order to pull them fully AFTER you have gotten one or more ruffs in the short trump hand (usually Dummy, but could be Declarer after a transfer sequence).
- 6) For most standard **end play situations**, you only have to **count trump** and manage your elimination prep work accurately. You will be eliminating at least one side suit from both your hand and Dummy, pulling trump (unless the throw-in card is a trump), and giving an opponent the lead in an evenly-divided suit (same number of cards in your hand and Dummy) at a time the opponent has to do something good for you—usually a ruff-and-sluff or a free finesse.
- 7) There are some **end play hands** in which you must **count three suits (and thus know the fourth)**. These are end plays based on count. Suppose, for example, someone preempts at the 3 level and you have Ax opposite xx in their suit (which they lead). You pull trumps (which are 2-2) and play the third suit which is AKx in your hand opposite xx in Dummy. When you ruff the 3rd round in Dummy, you discover that the preemptor had two cards in that suit as well, leaving only two cards in the 4th suit. Your 4th suit is AKxx opposite xxx. You cash the AK in that 4th suit and lead your Jack of spades to the preemptor. S/he has nothing but spades left, so must lead a spade, giving you a ruff-and-sluff, so that one of your losers goes away.
- 8) **Most hands, Declarer does NOT have to count opponents' high card points**. However, whenever you have a guess in a suit, such as KJ opposite xxx, you need to count points. Especially if someone has opened the bidding, passed as Dealer, passed as Responder, or failed to overcall at a low level, you have lots of information about likely high card points. You want to make Discovery Plays in suits that don't matter (e.g., KQxx opposite J10xx) before trying to guess correctly in suits that do matter (that dreaded KJx).

