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This series is all about counting defenders's points. It's counterpart (counting shape) is series 2422

VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		
♠ AJ2		
♥ 964		
♦ AJ65		
♣ 743		
West		East
♠ 753		♠ Q986
♥ AKQJ		♥ T82
♦ T742		♦ 9
♣ 85		♣ QJT92
South		
♠ KT4		
♥ 753		
♦ KQ83		
♣ AK6		

This series is about *counting the hand*. This technique is vital if you are to make a good bridge player. What, though, does it mean?

There are two series in this edition of V-Blue. In this series we are looking at how the opponents' points (by which we mean their high cards) are distributed. As you play the hand as declarer you can (or at least, should) count out how many points each opponent has shown up with.

How might that affect your thinking? Well, you may be able to deduce the location of a vital missing card if you reflect on what you know about the previous bidding and how the play has progressed.

Hand 1. Sometimes a hand depends on choosing to take a finesse the right way. Before resorting to guesswork make sure you check for clues from the bidding and the play.

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ A

You open with 1NT after three Passes with 15 points and a classically balanced (4-3-3-3) hand. Partner raises to 3NT.

West leads the ♥A against your game and you can see immediately that the opponents may be in a position to take the first five or six tricks. Even if Hearts break 4-3 (allowing East-West only four defensive Hearts) you still have only eight top tricks, namely: two Spades, four Diamonds and two Clubs. All you can do is sit and wait for a while as the defenders enjoy themselves.

West takes the top four Hearts and, in response to East's flamboyant discard of the ♣Q, shifts to the ♣8.

It looks like success will depend on you making three Spade tricks and that will depend on you taking the Spade finesse the right way. It's *find the lady* time. Your chance of success is apparently 50%.

Actually, if you have been watching the cards closely and thinking about the auction you should realize that your chance of success is nearer 100%. There was, you recall, no auction (apart from the perfunctory 1NT – 3NT) so East-West had nothing to say. And that is the crucial point.

You should have already noticed 10 points (the ♥A K Q J) in West's hand. This opponent dealt and Passed and he is unlikely to have done that with 12 points. With that inference, East should have the ♠Q.

You win with the ♠K in the closed hand at trick five and, with nothing better to do, cash your Diamonds and the ♠A. Nothing interesting happens (both opponents maintain stony countenances and three Spades each) but your path is set.

You cash the ♠A before playing a low Spade towards the ♠K 10 in the closed hand, finessing against East for the ♠Q. The ♠10 duly wins the trick in the closed hand (as you expected) and the hard work is done. You cash the ♠K to make your nine tricks and the contract.

Success here comes from counting the points

in your opponents' hands, realizing that West's initial Pass almost certainly sets an upper limit of 11 points on his hand, and therefore deducing that East must have the ♠Q.



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand SA	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 21/06/2014	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: H

After East Passes you open with 1NT with your 15 points and a classically balanced (4-3-3-3) hand. Partner raises to 3NT.

West leads the ♥10 against your game and you can see immediately that 3NT is a poor proposition. The defenders may well be able to take the first five or six tricks. Even if Hearts break 4-4 (allowing East-West only four defensive Hearts) you still have only seven top tricks, namely: two Spades, three Diamonds and two Clubs. A friendly 3-2 Diamond break will swell that to eight and a Spade finesse will make it nine – if, that is, you can gain the lead in time. All you can do is sit and scratch your nose for a while as the defenders enjoy themselves.

East takes the three top Hearts and plays a fourth round. You pitch a Club from hand and from dummy you throw a Club and a Diamond. Having taken four tricks West gets off lead with the ♠Q. What now?

Well, you have to try your luck in Diamonds. You cash the ♦A and ♦Q and are relieved that all follow. So your tricks have swelled to eight as you now have two Spades, four Diamonds (with the 3-2 split) and two Clubs. Where, though, is the ♠Q?

You have all the clues you need and, once again, it is the silence of the opponents that helps. You have already seen 10 points in East's hand (the ♥A K Q and the ♦J) and that player Passed initially, something he is unlikely to have done with 12 points. West, therefore, is the overwhelming favorite to hold the ♠Q.

When you can deduce the location of the opponents' cards it's all very easy. You can cash your Diamonds and the ♠A but it all comes down to the Spades. Problem? No problem! You just cash the ♠K and confidently play a Spade to the ♠J to wrap up nine tricks.

North	♠ AJ2	♥ J6	♦ A864	♣ 7543
West	♠ Q75	♥ T983	♦ 973	♣ QJ2
East	♠ 9843	♥ AKQ5	♦ JT	♣ T96
South	♠ KT6	♥ 742	♦ KQ52	♣ AK8

This deal has echoes with Hand 1 (odd how this happens so often with VuBridge, isn't it?).

Anyway, it's another **Find the Lady** hand.



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 1 SA	Contract: 3D By: South
Date: 21/06/2014	Board #: 3
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	3♦
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ A

You open 3♦ after two Passes and this buys the auction. Your hand is fairly typical for such an action having a decent seven-card suit and no outside four-card major. (*In passing, we ought to say that the condition about having no four-card major can be relaxed after partner has Passed*).

West leads the ♣A and continues with the ♣K which you ruff in the closed hand. You need seven trump tricks, one trick from Hearts and one from Spades. This will require a successful guess in Spades.

At some stage you will play a Spade towards the ♠K J and will have to decide whether to play the ♠J or the ♠K. In normal circumstances this is a 50-50 guess as West will play a small card with studied nonchalance whether has the ♠A or not.

After ruffing the ♣K you have no reason to defer drawing trumps. This takes three rounds as East turns up with ♦J × ×. At this stage you have no idea how to play the Spades so it is best play to set up to play the Spades by leading towards the ♥Q J 10 in dummy.

East wins with the ♥K and then cashes the ♥A before putting you back in dummy with the ♥Q. He has no sensible alternative defense as to return a Spade into dummy's ♠K J 4 would give the game away in that suit.

You cross back to hand by ruffing a Club (noting East's vehement signal for a Spade lead!) and now it is time to play the Spades. Do you believe your opponent or do you think him capable of subterfuge?

It is time to assess the hand, by counting points. You have already seen 9 points in East's hand (the ♥A K and two Jacks) and should remember that player Passed in second seat. Therefore, the ♠Q may be on your right but the ♠A cannot be as that would give East 13 points.

So you can smile at East's antics and play the ♠2 from the closed hand fully intending to play the ♠K from the dummy. West plays low with an innocent air, desperately trying to look like a man who hasn't got the ♠A. However, you didn't come down with the last rain shower; you play

North	♠ KJ4	♥ QJT	♦ Q5	♣ 96532
West	♠ A752	♥ 863	♦ 7	♣ AKT87
East	♠ QT93	♥ AK42	♦ J93	♣ J4
South	♠ 86	♥ 975	♦ AKT8642	♣ Q

Another deal on locating missing honor cards.

How well can you sniff out the position on this hand?

the ♠K which wins the trick and gives you the contract.

Your success comes from counting the points that you see in East's hand and realizing that East could not have the ♠A and Pass in second seat. That analysis helps you play the Spades correctly and by doing so you make your contract.



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ AT86	
	♥ AK42	
	♦ JT	
	♣ KT2	
West		East
♠ 73		♠ QJ9
♥ 96		♥ JT73
♦ AKQ5432		♦ 97
♣ 43		♣ Q965
	South	
	♠ K542	
	♥ Q85	
	♦ 86	
	♣ AJ87	

We are back to a **Find the Lady** deal.

Where is she hiding?

West	North	East	South
3♦	X	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: D

West opens a pre-emptive 3♦ and when partner Doubles for take-out your four-card Spade suit and 10 points are just enough for you to take a shot at 4♠.

West leads out the ♦A K (on which East plays *high-low* with the ♦9 and ♦7) then switches to a trump. You draw two rounds of trumps (relieved at the 3-2 break) leaving the ♠Q out for the defenders to take when they wish.

You have lost two Diamonds and cannot avoid losing a third trick to the master trump so you have to make sure you lose no other tricks. That will mean taking the Club finesse in the right direction but this is not really a guess.

West has already shown 7 points in Diamonds and must surely have all five remaining Diamonds (including the ♦Q). Even if West is an incautious bidder who might open 3♦ on a six-card suit, vulnerable, East has shown a doubleton Diamond by playing the ♦9 before the ♦7. This confirms the 7-2 Diamond break and strongly suggests that West hasn't a stitch outside his seven-card suit. The conclusion is that, almost certainly, East has the ♠Q.

You take three rounds of Hearts before trying the Clubs, playing the ♠K from dummy (North) followed by the ♣10 and East covers with the ♠Q confirming your analysis.


You have the ♣J winner to take, then a Club ruff, and will then have two trumps left in your hand. Somewhere along the way someone will take the ♠Q but that will be the last trick the defense will get.



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

North		
♠ J5		
♥ KT9		
♦ K8532		
♣ K64		
West		East
♠ AKQT		♠ 864
♥ 854		♥ Q72
♦ JT94		♦ 76
♣ T9		♣ 87532
South		
♠ 9732		
♥ AJ63		
♦ AQ		
♣ AQJ		

When you have two chances of making a contract you must be careful to play the suits in the right order to make the most of your chances.

If one of your chances is a two-way finesse it can often be right to delay that for as long as possible until you have unearthed all the clues.

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♣
P	1♦	P	2NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ A

You (South) open 1♣ in fourth seat, the normal action with three Clubs, 4-4 in the majors and a hand too strong to open 1NT. Over partner's 1♦ response you rebid 2NT to show a balanced hand of 18-19 points. North has an easy raise to 3NT.

West leads off with four rounds of Spades before switching, unhelpfully, to a Club. You have to make the rest of the tricks and that means either finding the Diamonds splitting 3-3 or taking the Heart finesse. The Heart layout means that you can play either opponent for the ♥Q – a classic *two-way finesse*. (Not the first one we have seen in this series...!)

You should try the Diamonds first since a 3-3 break will give you nine tricks without further thought and, anyway, the result of that experiment, even if unsuccessful, may help you make an accurate decision in Hearts.

That is the best line of play: On the last two Spade leads from West you throw one Diamond and one Club from the dummy (four Diamond tricks would be enough for your contract so you don't need to keep all five).

After the Club switch you first try your luck in Diamonds by cashing the ♠A Q before crossing to dummy with a Club to cash the ♦K. Diamonds aren't splitting but you have now seen 10 points appear from West, namely the ♠A K Q and the ♦J.

If West also held the ♥Q he would have had 12 points and is likely to have opened the bidding. With the weight of evidence strongly pointing to East as the player most likely to hold the vital ♥Q you can trap Her Majesty with a simple finesse.

All you need to do is cash the ♥K from dummy followed by leading another Heart. When East plays low you insert the ♥J from the closed hand which wins (as you expected). Now the ♥A and ♣A make up the tricks for your contract.

This is another contract you make through the silence of your opponents in the auction.



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 1 SA

Date: 21/06/2014

Dealer: East

[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N

By: South

Board #: 6

Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

You end in 3NT after a fast, simple and familiar auction.

West leads the ♦J, probably the top-of-a-sequence. You contemplate poor prospects in this contract with just five top tricks with a couple of slow tricks in Spades. It looks as though the opponents may well be able to set up their Diamonds and then reach them with their top Spades.

You go up with dummy's ♦Q, which East takes with the ♠A and returns a Diamond. To break communications you duck this and West clears the Diamonds, East throwing a Spade.

You have little choice now but to knock out the ♠A K, fully expecting West to have one of them to gain the lead and cash his Diamonds. Nope, your luck is in today, East has them both so he takes his ♠A and shifts to a Heart. You take that and plug away in Spades. East takes the ♠K and exits with another Heart.

You cash the remaining Spades (noticing West pitch two Hearts) and then cash the last Heart. By now – if you have been paying attention – you have two counts on the deal. One is with the *shapes* of the hand and one is with the *points allocation*.

Let's look at *shape* first. West is known to have started with five Diamonds. He followed to two Hearts and two Spades. On the long Spades he pitched two Hearts, showing that he had exactly two Spades, four Hearts and five Diamonds. That leaves him with precisely two Clubs.

Now let's look at the *points*. East produces the ♠A K and the ♦A and yet Passed as Dealer. So the obvious conclusion is that he cannot hold the ♣Q as well. Knowing, however, that West only has two Clubs you can confidently play off the ♠A K and drop the Queen.

"That was lucky", says West, sourly...

North		East
♠ JT2		♠ AK76
♥ Q53		♥ T98
♦ KQ3		♦ A4
♣ K872		♣ T963
West		South
♠ 85		♠ Q943
♥ 7642		♥ AKJ
♦ JT965		♦ 872
♣ Q5		♣ A,J4

Sometimes counting the opponents' hands during the play helps you avoid a losing line.

In this case it enables you to find a slim chance. As the play progresses, though, that slim chance becomes a sure thing...