

The primary focus of Always Be Counting is to visualize all four hands as if you were seeing the hand in the bridge column of the newspaper. Achieving this reconstruction requires some basic arithmetic together with processing information from bids made, bids not made, and opening leads. So began the last ABC article. This article will begin with an example of Counting and transition to a discussion of the other two Cs: Communicating and Curiosity.

The following hand arose at a Sectional in Florida over the past winter.

Dealer: South		Vulnerability: None			
		<u>N</u>		Actual Auction:	
		♠ 932		<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>
		♥ 85		1♠	2♥
		♦ AK53		P	P
		♣ J854			
		<u>W</u>		<u>E</u>	
♠ -				♠ AQJ84	
♥ QJ743				♥ 2	
♦ J974				♦ 1086	
♣ AQ106				♣ K972	
		<u>S</u>			
		♠ K10765			
		♥ AK1096			
		♦ Q2			
		♣ 3			

First we will look at the play of the hand and then focus on the bidding. West chose to lead the Q♥. I applied the Counting principle of adding my HCP to my partner's HCP and subtracting the sum from 40. Thus I recognized that the opponents held 20 HCPs. I then examined the opening lead and recognized that my LHO did not hold the AK of clubs nor the KQ of clubs as a club lead would have been a more preferred lead than the Q♥. My next thought was that my LHO likely held the A♠.

The Q♥ was captured by the A♥ and three rounds of diamonds allowed me to discard my losing club. At trick four I called for dummy's 2♠ and East followed with the 4♠. Fearing a possible stiff A♠ on my left, I played the 5♠, which, to my

surprise, won the trick as West showed out. Now it was time for me to place myself into West's head. West does not know who holds the K♥.

The next card out of the South hand was the 6♥. West paused for a moment, and, as I had hoped, played a low heart. East ruffed the 8♥ with the 8♠ and shifted to a low club. Of course I trumped that club and via some careful declarer play, finished with 9 tricks for a plus 140 score.

A quick comment on the bidding is in order. West would have been better served by making a takeout double, the book bid with that distribution. They might have wound up by buying the contract in NT or clubs and obtained a better score than minus 140.

Janis, my favorite partner, suggested I call the following discussion "Everything You Wanted To Know About Communicating But Were Afraid To Ask." The main theme is to enhance your bidding system to deal with infrequent situations that may arise in the bidding. For example, how does your partnership compete against Big Club openers (Precision, Schenken, etc), 2♦ openers (Flannery, Roman, etc), weak NT openers, and other esoteric bidding conventions?

Applying the Curiosity principle, I suggest that these somewhat infrequent conventions be researched and discussed with your partner. In the old days, I would use my Encyclopedia of Bridge to obtain the relevant information. In today's world, merely GOOGLE the convention and determine how best to compete against these conventions and treatments. Include in your research other defensive carding systems such as Odd/Even, Upside down, Smith Echo, etc.

When you play competitive bridge, always scan the opponent's convention card before playing the first hand. Get into the habit of applying the three pillars of the ABC of Bridge – Counting, Communicating, and Curiosity and your bridge results will show improvement.