

## Hand Evaluation

The basic aim of bidding is to reach the best possible contract level on most occasions. You cannot bid correctly if you do not know the worth of your hand. To know the worth of your hand you need a uniform and reliable yardstick. The reliability of the most widely used Point Count method leaves much to be desired. It works fine on a balanced hand but fails to deliver the goods on a distributional one. The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge (5th Edition, ACBL, p.157) states: *"Hands that contain eight, nine or ten-card suits, plus a void or two....defy scientific evaluation, and past experiences are of no help in appraising these anomalies"*.

Let us examine the following hand in light of the above comments. It makes 7 on the trot, regardless of any lead.

```
AKQJ1098765432
-
-
□□ -
```

The Standard established by Goren for making a grand slam is 37+ points. Conversely, a hand that makes a grand slam must also have 37+ points. According to the original Goren Point Count method, the valuation of the hand works out to 19 points. (10 for the high cards plus 9 points for the three voids). The valuation is in total discord with the Standard. In order to overcome the shortcomings and address the anomaly the Point Count method has been overhauled and streamlined.

The Orient Bidding System has evolved a modified Distributional Method for hand evaluation. It retains Milton Works Count 4-3-2-1 for Ace, King, Queen and Jack respectively and assigns separate values for distribution. Adjustments for wasted high card values and inadequate trump support are made in the final count, as and where necessary.

The following hands make grand slams, 7NT and 7 respectively and therefore, according to the Point Count Standard should have 37+ points. Using the Orient method they may be evaluated on a uniform basis using a single yardstick.

### Hand - A

```
AKQJ
AKQ
AKQ
□ AKQ
```

### Hand - B

```
AKQJ1098765432
-
-
□ □
```

As per the Orient Valuation method Hand-A and Hand-B contain 38 and 37 points respectively (including values for distribution) and hence fulfill the Standard point requirement grand slam bid.

Distributional values have mystic powers. At times they can be far more powerful than the high card

points. Following is a constructed example to show how distribution can reduce a power-packed HCP hand into a pulp.

**Dir. North; Both Vul.**

North	AQ1093	Q8765432	-	-
□ □	-	-	-	-
West	KJ8	AK	AK98	□ J943
East	-	J109	QJ1063	□ AKQ102
South	76542	-	7542	□ 8765

With 32 HCP, E/W cannot stop 7 by North. The combined strength count of North/South hands works out to 37 points and thus meets the point count Standard for Grand Slam bid.

Just as flesh cannot be separated from the bone of a living body, similarly, the distributional values cannot be detached from the high card points. Together they constitute the body of a hand. A hand valuation method must therefore take both these essential ingredients into account. The method must show uniformity both for the balanced as well as the distributional hands. Above all, it must fulfill as nearly as possible, the prescribed point count Standard for various contract levels: 26 for a game in major or 3NT, 29 for game in minor, 33 for a small slam and 37+ points for a grand slam (originally established by Goren, in the late forties).

Bissel (1936) was probably the first to advocate showing of distribution with the first bid. The idea was subsequently expanded by Fred Karpin. However, the first authority to accept distribution as equal or superior to high cards was Culbertson, perhaps the greatest innovator and genius, the world of bridge has ever produced.

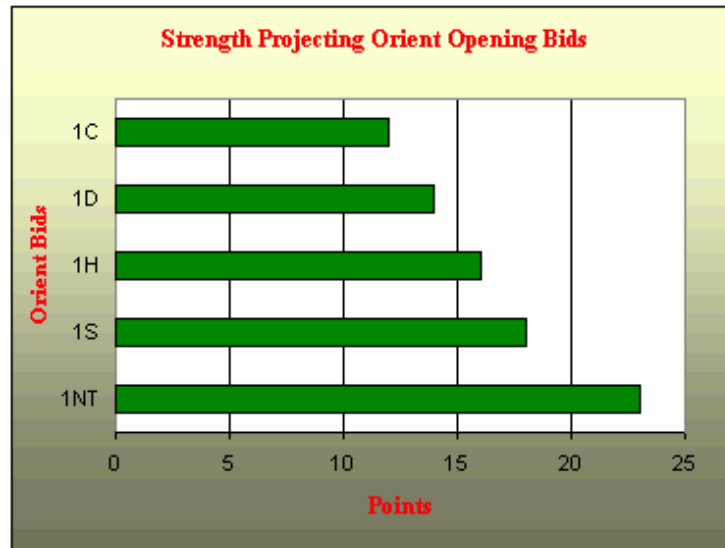
The Orient Valuation method works satisfactorily on most hands and helps in projection of full or nearly full strength of the hand in one bid. The following hands illustrate the concept. All have identical high card values but vastly different playing strengths and trick taking capacities.

[A]	[B]	[C]	[D]	[E]	[F]
AQJx AJxx xxx □ xx	AQJx x AJx xxx □ xx	AQJx xx AJx xx □ xx	AQJx xxxx Ax Jx □ x	AQJx xxx AJxx x □ x	AQJx xxx AJxx xx - □ -
12 Points	13 Points	15 Points	16 Points	18 Points	23 Points
Orient Bid: 1□	Orient Bid: 1□	Orient Bid: 1	Orient Bid: 1	Orient Bid: 1	Orient Bid: 1NT

It will be observed that excluding values for shortness (one), the opening bids portray full or nearly full strength of the hand in one bid. This facilitates in estimation of the combined strength count and playable level in the very first round of bidding (part score, game, or slam). The information is of utmost importance in an interference marred auction, especially 3+ level intervention when no opportunity may be available to the opener to show the actual strength through subsequent rebid (reverse, jump shift, etc. -

natural bidding approach).

The above strength projecting Orient opening bids are graphically illustrated below:



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