22) Hand evaluation

All too often, a hand strength is evaluated only by the HCP count.
In reality, a hand strength should be measured by its capability to generate a certain number of tricks.
The criteria to be used are the following:

1) Quantity of HCP.
2) Quality of HCP. We all know that Q and J are defined as *uncertain* honours because they cannot guarantee a trick unlike A and K that are defined as *certain* honours.
3) Fit with partner. It is intuitive that a hand with a fit, that is at least 8 cards in a given suit, will guarantee more tricks than a hand without fit.
4) Distributional strength. While in a 4333 shape, the strength is limited to HCP, in an unbalanced hand like 5521 or 6502, long suits, once established, can generate additional tricks.

Above mentioned concepts are certainly nothing new but Marty Bergen , in his book "Slam bidding", that we highly recommend, had the brilliant idea to substitute numerical values to qualitative evaluations. We are not talking about a trivial idea because, generally, for the average bridge player, the message is much clearer when we say that a given hand is worth 16 HCP instead of saying that that hand has 12 HCP but is worth more.

Evaluation before bidding:

a) UnderValued Honours (A and 10= **UVH**), OverValued Honours (Q and J = **OVH**) for every 3 UVH net of OVH add 1 Point, for every 3 OVH net of UVH deduct 1 Point.
b) For every 5, 6, or 7 carder (Long Suit = **LS**) add respectively 1,2 or 3 points.
c) For every suit at least 4th containing 3 of the 5 honours (Quality Suit = **QS**) add 1 point.
d) For every doubleton (**DT**) composed by KQ, KJ, QJ, Qx, Jx deduct 1 point. For any stiff honour (**ST**), (except A) deduct 1 point.
e) If our hand has only 1 suit with 4+ cards without a singleton (FLAT) such as 4333, 5332, 6322 or 7222, deduct 1point
Points calculated as above are added to HCP and defined as Starting Points (**SP**).
The same evaluation is made when overcalling with a minor at 2 level or with a major at 1 level.

Let us see some examples:

Hand 1: ♠ AKQ105 ♥10982 ♦6 ♣J67   HCP : 10

3 UVH – 1 OVH = 2 No adjustment

LS = +1 P

DT e Sing = 0

QS = + 1P

FLAT = 0   total 10 +1 +1 = **12SP** open 1♠.

Hand 2: ♠ AK109 ♥ KJ3 ♦J109 ♣567   HCP = 12

3 UVH -2 OVH= 1 No adjustment

LS = 0

DT e Sing = 0

QS = 0

FLAT= -1   total 12 -1 = **11SP** pass in 1° seat

Hand 3: ♠A104 ♥10543 ♦KJ67 ♣K10   HCP = 11

4 UVH – 1 OVH= 3   +1 P

LS = 0

DT e Sing= 0

QS = 0

FLAT = 0   total 11 + 1 = **12SP** open 1♦.

Hand 4: ♠AQ4 ♥AQ105 ♦K1067 ♣A2   HCP = 19

5 UVH – 2 OVH= 3 +1 P

LS = 0

DT e Sing = 0

QS = 1   +1 P   total 19 + 1 + 1 = **21SP** open 2SA (20-21 Bal)

FLAT = 0

Hand 5: ♠QJ6 ♥QJ7 ♦KQ73 ♣KJ2   HCP = 15

0 UVH- 6 OVH = 6   - 2P

LS = 0

DT e Sing = 0

QS = 0

FLAT = -1P   total   15 -2 -1 = **12SP** open 1♦

Hand evaluation after partner has bid 1 in a major and a fit has been identified.

When partner opens 1 in a major and we have a fit in his suit, we have to revise our hand evaluation as follows:

a) add 1 point for every doubleton (DT) we have.
b) add 2 points for every singleton (ST). In case we have a fit of 4+ cards in partner suit, we should add 3 points for every singleton.
c) If we have a void we shall add a number of points equal to the number of cards of our fit.

Points calculated as above are added to SP and defined as Dummy Points (DP)

Hand evaluation after partner has bid 1 in a minor

In such a case there is no re-evaluation and DP are equal to SP

Hand evaluation when partner has overcalled with a minor at 2 level or with a major at 1 level

In this case re-evaluation of dummy hand takes place as when partner has opened 1 in a major.
Let us see some examples when partner has opened 1♠:

1) ♠AJ62 ♥6542 ♦– ♣AK987:   HCP = 12
        2 UVH = ++   1 OVH = 2+ minus 1 =1+ no change.
        1LS = +1P
        DT e ST = 0
        QS = 0
        FLAT =0   **SP** = 12 + 1 = **13**
        DT=0
        Sing= 0
        Void= +4   **DP** = 13 +4= **17**

2) ♠AQ67 ♥678 ♦AK10432 ♣- :   HCP = 13
        3 UVH = +++ 1 OVH = 3-1 =2 no change
        1LS = +2P
        DT e ST = 0
        QS = +1P
        FLAT = 0   **SP** = 13 + 2 +1 = **16**
        DT e Sing = 0
        Void = +4   **DP** = 16 +4 = **20**

3) ♠KQJ32 ♥1098 ♦7 ♣J987 :   HCP 7

            1 UVH -3 OVH= -2 no change

            1 LS = + 1P

            DT e Sing = 0

            QS = + 1P

            FLAT= 0   **SP** = 7 +1+1 = **9**

            DT e Sing = +3P

            Void = 0   **DP** = 9 + 3 = **12**

4) ♠9876 ♥AK ♦75 ♣AQ1084 :   HCP 13

            3 UVH – 1 OVH = +2 no change

            1 LS = + 1P

            DT e Sing = 0

            QS = +1P

            FLAT = 0   **SP** = 13 + 1 + 1 = **15**

            DT e Sing = +2 P

            Void = 0   **DP** = 15 + 2 = **17**

5) ♠10986 ♥K ♦753 ♣Q9432 :   HCP 5

            1 UVH – 1 OVH = 0

            1 LS = + 1P

            DT e Sing = - 1

            QS = 0

            FLAT = 0   **SP** = 5 +1 -1 = **5**

            DT e Sing = +3

            VOID = 0   **DP** = 5 + 3 = **8**

6) ♠102 ♥J64 ♦KQJ ♣KQ1098 :   HCP 12

            2 UVH – 4 OVH = -2 no change

            1 LS = + 1P

            1 DT e Sing = 0

             QS = + 1

             FLAT = -1   **PP** = 12 +1 +1 -1 = **13**

            DT e Sing = +1

            VOID = 0   **PM** = 13 + 1 = **14**

Re-evaluation of opener hand after fit has been identified

Opener obviously cannot know about DP and has to base himself only on PP but once the <u>fit with dummy</u> is known can modify his evaluation as follows:

  a) Add 1 Point if he has a six carder or add 2 Points with a 7 carder.
  b) If he has a 4 cards suit or a 5 cards suit on the side add 1 Point.
  c) If he has 2 or 3 DT add 1 Point, if he has 1 ST add 1 Point for each ST , if he has a void add 4 Points for each void.

The re-evaluated point count, after knowing the fit, is defined as Bergen Points (**BP**).

Let us examine the following hands after fit has been identified:

♠AKQ105   HCP=10   Fit♠
♥10982   3 UVH – 2 OVH = +1 = no change
♦6   1LS = + 1P
♣J67   DT e Sing = 0
                 QS = + 1P
                 FLAT= 0   **SP** = 10 + 1 + 1 = **12**
                 Suit 6° + = 0
                 4° on the side = + 1P
                 ST = + 2P   **BP** = 12 + 1 + 2 = **15 BP**

♠AKJ109   HCP = 13   Fit♠
♥KJ3   3 UVH – 3 OVH = 0
♦J105   1LS = + 1P
♣56   DT e ST = 0
                 QS = + 1P
                 FLAT = -1P   **SP** = 13 +1 +1 -1 = **14**
                 Suit 6°+ = 0
                 4° on the side = 0
                 DT and ST = 0   **BP** = 14 + 0 = **14 BP**

♠K78   HCP = 17   Fit♥
♥AQ9852   4 UVH – 1 OVH = +3 = + 1 P
♦A109   1LS = +1P
♣A   DT e ST = 0
              QS = 0
              FLAT = 0   **SP** = 17 +1 +1 = **19**
              Suit 6°+ = + 1P
              4° on the side = 0
              DT and ST = + 2P   **BP** = 19 + 1 + 2 = **22 BP**

♠AK42   HCP = 19   Fit♥
♥KQ632   3 UVH – 1 OVH = +2 no change
♦AK109   1LS = +1 P
♣-   DT e ST = 0
              QS = + 1P
              FLAT = 0   **SP** = 19 + 1 + 1 = **21**
              Suit 6°+ = 0
              4° on the side = + 2P
              1 Void = + 4P   **BP** = 21 + 6 = **27 BP**

Conclusion

It happens, from time to time, that we bid 4♥ or 4♠ and we make 6.
Usually the comment that follows is "this slam is unbiddable, how can
we bid slam with 25 HCP ??"
The secret lays in a correct hand evaluation. HCP are not the only factor
to measure a hand strength. Whether it is a matter of upgrading or
downgrading a hand strength, there are 4 factors that contribute to the
process of hand evaluation and all of them should be kept in due count.
In the above few examples we have seen hands with only 10 HCP that
represent a solid opening and hands with 12 HCP where pass is the
best option.
By the same token, we can say that bidding a forcing relay with 12 HCP
is a gross simplification: not all 12 HCP are worth the same and each
hand should be evaluated on its own merit.
Marty Bergen innovative approach can be very useful not only in slam
bidding but also in other circumstances.

I believe that, although at the beginning we would not be able to make an accurate evaluation, if we keep on trying to evaluate the hands we are playing, we cannot but improve our evaluating ability to the benefit of our bridge level and can certainly avoid costly misunderstandings.