

THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS

Although two suits can never be trump at the same time, and both sides can, therefore, never play the hand at the same time as Declarer, the following two conditions exist on any hand:

1. **The Total Number of Tricks** is the combined total tricks available to both sides (assuming best play and defense) if they each were to play in their best (longest) fit, and
2. **The Total Number of Trumps** is the combined total number of cards in both sides' best trump fit.

In the following hand, if North/South were to play in Hearts they would take *nine tricks* (losing two tricks in each Minor suit). If East/West were to play the same hand in Diamonds they would take *seven tricks* (losing three tricks in Spades, two tricks in Hearts, and the Ace of Clubs).

Note that North/South and East/West *each hold eight trumps*.

	KQX	
	KQJX	
	XXX	
	XXX	
XXX		XXXX
XX		XXX
AJTXX		KQX
KQX		JTX
	AJT	
	ATXX	
	XX	
	AXXX	

Thus, in this deal, even though both sides cannot play the hand at the same time, for argument's sake, there are *16 total tricks* available and *16 total trumps*. The **LAW of TOTAL TRICKS**, states that the Total Number of Tricks available to both teams, on any deal, is equal to the Total Number of Trumps held by both teams cumulatively. Under most circumstances, the total trick count is never changed; i.e., remains constant, in that (1), the *location of high cards* is inconsequential because finesses that are *onside* for one pair will be *offside* for the other; and (2), the *distribution of the suits* also remains irrelevant because *bad breaks* for one side translate into *good breaks* for the other.

In reality, when using the **LAW**, however, its efficacy, although usually correct, is sometimes off by one trick, rarely by two. *Negative adjustment* usually results from "*soft holdings*" in the Opponent's trump suit and should cause one to lower one's estimate of the total number of tricks. Conversely, a *positive adjustment* is likely to occur in hands with "*super fits*," and/or ones with "*wild distribution*."

The key to using the **LAW** during the bidding is to know how many trump each side holds. An exact calculation as to the number of trumps is not always easy, but an approximation is all that is needed. In competitive auctions, although vulnerability and high cards do, on occasion, have relevance, **you should always compete to the bidding level whose trick commitment is equal to the combined number of trumps held by your side**, because, **no matter how many tricks you go down, the LAW equation will ensure that there are enough Total Trumps on the deal (LAW Protection) to ensure that your Opponents have a makeable contract worth more than the penalty they'll collect by defeating you, should they attempt and succeed in doing so.**

The ability for either side to arrive at the proper **LAW of TOTAL TRICK**-governed, bidding level is facilitated by a team's use of any of the following bidding tools as a guide in determining the distribution in the hand and, by utilization of this information, the **LAW**-protected bidding level can be calculated from the cumulative number of trumps present in the hand. The tools available, among others include:

1. **Bergen Raise:** (Designed to tell Partner one's strength and the number of support trumps.)
 - a) **2-of-a-Major raise** = 3-card support (a constructive raise) with 7-10 HCP's.
 - b) **"2-NT"** = 4-card support (game-forcing **Jacoby-2-NT**) with 13 (+) HCP's
 - c) **"3C"** = 4-card support (a constructive raise) with 7-10 HCP's
 - d) **"3D"** = 4-card support (a limit raise) with 10-12 HCP's
 - e) **3-of-a-Major raise** = 4-card support (a pre-emptive bid) with 0-6 HCP's
 - f) **4-of-a-Major raise** = 5-card support (a pre-emptive bid) with 0-6 HCP's

Note: (All of the above bids are designed to reach the **LAW** level *immediately*.)
2. **Pre-emptive Raise in Competition:** (Designed to get to the proper preemptive level)
1C/1D – 1H/1S – Pass – 3H/3S = a jump-raise with 4-card support with 0-7 HCP's
3. **Responding to Jacoby Transfers:** (Designed to get to the 3-level with 9 (+) trumps)

1-NT – Pass – "2D"/"2H" – Pass
2H/2S = 2-card or 3-card support with 15-17 HCP's (or)
3H/3S = 4-card support with a maximum of 17 HCP's
4. **Preempting:** (Designed to bid to a level whose trick commitment is equivalent to the number of pieces in the pre-empt suit)
 An opening bid of **2D/2H/2S** = 6-pieces (or) An opening bid of **3C/3D/3H/3S** = 7-pieces
5. **The "DONT" Convention:** (Designed to be able to find a competitive fit at the 2-level) Finding an 8-card or better fit at the 2-level will be protected by the **LAW**.
6. **Support Doubles:** (Designed to tell Partner whether you have 3- or 4-card support)
1C/1D – 1H/1S – Double – 2H/2S or **Redouble** (or) **1C/1D – 1H – 1S – 2H/Double**
 4-piece support or 3-piece support, respectively, with 6 - 10 HCP's
7. **Sandwich 1-No-Trump/Unusual 2-No-Trump:** (Designed to enter the auction at a low Level with 2-as-yet un-bid (5-5 or better) suits, using the **LAW** as competitive protection) **1x – Pass – 1y/2x – 1-NT/2-NT** = 5-5 or better, very weak or very strong, in the 2-as-yet un-bid suits, or in the 2-lower un-bid suits, respectively
8. **Two-Way Drury:** (Designed to immediately show 2- or 3-card support with invitational values)

Pass – Pass – 1H/1S – Pass
"2C" = 3-card support with invitational values (or)
"2D" = 4-card support with invitational values

CONCLUSIONS: (1) The **LAW of TOAL TRICKS** dictates that a team *can* and *should* bid, in a competitive scenario, to the level whose trick commitment is equal to the number of trumps held by their side, protected by the **LAW**, as described above. (2) Do *not* let the Opponents ever play at a level whose trick commitment is equal to their number of trumps. (3) Be wary of competing against auctions that do not guarantee an 8-card fit, and (4) Never hang Partner for balancing, recognizing that Partner is using the **LAW** so as to thwart the Opponents from playing at the 2-level in their 8-card fit.

Since it is important, motivated and protected by the **LAW**, not to allow the Opponents to play in 8-card fits, there are several methods to accomplish this when the Opponents attempt to stop at the 2-level with 8-trumps. Among others, they are as follows:

Methods Used to Keep the Opponents from Playing at the 2-Level

1. **OBAR Bids (Opponents Bid And Raise – Balance In the Direct Seat):** (Designed to thwart the Opponents from coming into the auction when your team would have normally stopped at the 2-level, inducing them to compete)
 - 1H – Pass – 2H – Pass
 - “3H” (An obstructive raise – Partner must not punish, it is not invitational)
 - (**Note:** Had Opener “*Passed*,” the 2nd-seat Player could have, using the LAW, competed)
2. **Scrambling 2-NT:** (Designed to find a competitive fit with Partner following the Opponents having found an 8-card Major suit fit) = A “*Responsive*” Double to a “*Take-Out*” Double = “*Pick a suit Partner!*”
 - 1H/1S – Pass -- 2H/2S -- Pass
 - Pass – Double – Pass – “2-NT” (“Scrambling” = “Partner, I’m not sure what to bid, you choose the suit!”)
3. **“Super” Unusual 2-NT:** (Designed to show any 2-suits, used following after the opponents have bid and raised) = An any two-suit take-out
 - 1H/1S – Pass – 2H/2S – “2-NT”
4. **Good-Bad 2-NT:** (Designed to compete to the 3-level *without* showing extra values)

In a competitive auction, when one’s RHO makes any 2-level call, our 2-NT bid is *not* natural. It shows the desire to compete at the 3-level, and requests Partner to “*puppet*” a “3C” bid, after which the 2-NT bidder then shows his/her suit.

 - 1H – 2D – 2H – 2S/3C/3D (Stronger) (vs.) 1H --- 2D ---- 2H - “2-NT”
 - Pass – “3C” – Pass -- 3D (Weaker)
5. **Inverted Minor-Suit Raises:** (Designed to preempt the Opponents, with 6-10 HCP’s; i.e., showing constructive support for Partner’s opening Minor by using a jump-raise - preserving the bid at the 2-level to signify the stronger, limit raise or better. Designed to quickly get past the 2-level of their suspected Major suit with weaker support)
 - 1C/1D – Pass – 3C/3D = 4-pieces (+) with 6-10 HCP’s (constructive raise (or)
 - 1C/1D – Pass – 2C/2D = 4-pieces (+) with 11 (+) HCP’s (limit raise or better)

Maxims Related to the LAW of TOTAL TRICKS

1. The 5-level belongs to the Opponents
2. When in doubt, bid 4-Spades over the Opponents 4-Hearts
3. When in doubt, bid one more on freak deals
4. In competitive auctions, when you hold 4-trumps, consider making a penalty double
5. Never outbid the Opponents on the 3-level with 16 total trumps
6. Always outbid the Opponents on the 3-level with 18 total trumps.