

# COUNT! *By Peg Kaplan*

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Someone asked me earlier this week what a player can do to improve their bridge game. I could offer lots of advice (and shall do so later this week, along with several other lecturers). But if I could give only one bit of advice, it might be this: count! Bridge is a game of logic, deduction and odds. If you don't take in all the evidence you have available to you, then it is tough to beat the competition. Here is a hand from high level competition. You find yourself in the Vanderbilt, the premier team event at the spring nationals. You are battling away against one of the top teams, and find yourself searching for 13 tricks. (Yep; you're in a grand slam.)

Here is your hand and dummy:

**Ax**

**Axxxx**

**AD10x**

**xx**

**RDx**

**RV9**

**Rxxx**

**ARD**

The opening foray is a spade. What are you thinking, and how do you propose to take 13 tricks?

Assuming that you can play the diamonds for 4 winners, you have 12 tricks on top: 3 spades, 2 hearts, 4 diamonds and 3 clubs. You need one more, and hearts is the only source. It seems that the contract rests on a simple finesse in that suit. Let's dig deeper, however, and see what other options we might have. Try cashing all your winners. When you do, *if you count*, you'll learn something most useful.

You will find out that your LHO has only 2 spades (he shows out on the third round of the suit). You'll discover that LHO has 2 diamonds (again, he fails to follow on the third round). And you'll learn that LHO has 5 clubs; he follows to the AKQ and pitches two clubs when he cannot follow suit to spades and diamonds. What do we then know? We *know* that LHO must have 4 hearts, since he needs 4 hearts to have 13 cards in his hand. If LHO has 4 hearts, the odds are great that the heart finesse will not work. But look at the spots. We have the nine of hearts in our possession, in addition to the other honors. It's a big card.

Play the king of hearts out of your hand. If the heart queen drops on your right – great! You've got 13 tricks. Even if the queen doesn't appear, though, you have one more string in your bow. RHO can have the 10. He does – and you now can claim! Run the *jack* of hearts after the king, playing Low if LHO doesn't cover. As RHO shows out, you win the trick and your grand slam – just as you knew you would *if you were counting!*

The good news is that you have scored 2210! The disappointing news is that your world class opponents reached the same contract and made it just as you did; by counting. Part of how your opponents became world class was through counting.

If

you add it to your repertoire, you'll be on your way to the head of the class!