Bridgetoday.com and Bridgetoday University Present:
COUNTING 140 with Eddie Kantar

Lesson 1

As an intermediate player you are being asked to develop your counting skills. Don't panic, you can do it. Like any other skill, patience, a good sense of humor, and practice, practice, practice will get you through this — I promise.

A. Distribution (also known as hand pattern)

Let's start at the end and then go back to the beginning. Your goal when counting a hand is to discover the distribution or hand pattern of one of the defenders' hands. Once you know what one defender has, you automatically know what the other has. So, you see, it's going to be easier than you think — counting one hand, not two.

When you first pick up your bridge hand, what do you do? If you are like 99.9% of all bridge players you add up your points. Then, depending upon who your teacher is or was, you either add extra points for long suits or short suits (hopefully not both!) or you don't add anything for either your long or short suits, saving your higher math until you see whether or not there is a fit (what the big boys do).

Enough propaganda, this is a lesson on the play of the hand. Say you pick up this hand:

```
5
A Q 10 4
K Q 9 6 5
A J 4
```

Nice hand, isn't it? OK, you have 16 HCP, but equally important is your 5-4-3-1 hand pattern. (We start with the longest suit first, the next longest suit second, etc. when discussing hand patterns in these lessons.) The more familiar you become are with various hand patterns, the easier it will be to count a bridge hand. From now on, every time you pick up your hand look at your distribution. Become familiar with the various hand patterns. Just do it!

Just so you are on top of everything, the three most common hand patterns are:

1. Any 4-4-3-2 pattern (21.5%); these hands are all "4-4-3-2" hands:

```
A K x x        J x            A x x
Q x x x        A x x          A K x x
A x x          Q x x x        J x
J x            A K x x        Q x x x
```

2. Any 5-3-3-2 pattern (15.5%):

```
A K x x x      Q x x          J x
Q x x          J x            A K x x x
A x x          A K x x x      A x x
J x            A x x          Q x x
```

3. Any 5-4-3-1 pattern (13%):

```
A K x x x      Q x x x        x
Q x x x        A x x          A K x x x
A x x          x              Q x x x
x              A K x x x      A x x
```

This means that 50% of the time you will be looking at one of these three distributions. Throw in any 5-4-2-2 or any 4-3-3-3 and suddenly you are up to 70%.

So exactly how do you go about determining which of these hand patterns your opponents have as soon as possible? It doesn't do much good to know what their distribution was after the hand is over and you have gone down! The following is a list of the aides (crutches) you can use to help you count the hand!

```
   Crutch #1     THEIR BIDDING
```

It is assumed in this discussion that you are familiar with your opponents' bidding methods. For example, do they play five card majors, Weak Twos, Michaels Cue Bids, etc? Can you imagine how easy it is to count a hand if the opponents have used a Michaels Cue Bid? You have a great head start, you already know the distribution of two of the bidder's suits. If you become the declarer against a two-suited bidder, all you need to discover is the distribution of one of the other suits. Piece of cake.

Let's practice against a Michaels Cue Bid overcall:

```
        North (partner)
        7 4 3
        Q J 10 9
        J 6 4
        K 9 4

        South (you)
        A K Q
        8
        9 8 2
        A J 10 7 6 4
```

```
South   West    North   East
1C      2C*     pass    2H
3C      (all pass)
```

*Michaels Cue Bid; shows 5-5 in the majors

West leads the ace and king of diamonds, then shifts to the jack of spades. Since West showed 5-5 in the majors and has played two rounds of diamonds, you know that he has at most one club. There-fore, you win the spade, cross to dummy's king of clubs (West fol-lows) and you confidently finesse East's queen of clubs. You end up losing three diamonds and a heart, making three clubs. That wasn't so tough, was it?

The whole hand was:

```
                    North (partner)
                    7 4 3
                    Q J 10 9
                    J 6 4
                    K 9 4
West                                    East
J 10 9 6 2                              8 5
K 7 6 4 2                               A 5 3
A K                                     Q 10 7 5 3
3                                       Q 8 5
                    South (you)
                    A K Q
                    8
                    9 8 2
                    A J 10 7 6 4
```

   Of course, you are not always going to get such a quick count,
but if there is bidding, particularly two-suited bidding,it helps
big time.

   As another confidence builder, let's play a hand after an oppo-
nent has preempted. When a player preempts, that player has a long
suit. (Good thinking, Eddie.) Say your LHO opens or overcalls 3H.
For the moment, at least, you presume a seven-card suit. (Things
may happen to change your mind about the length, but for the time
being assume what's normal.) Once a player is known to have a long
suit, count that hand rather than the partner's, simply because it
is easier. If the 3H bidder has seven hearts, he has *six* cards that
aren't hearts. If the partner of the 3H bidder happens to have a
singleton heart, that player has *twelve* cards that *aren't* hearts.
Why work with big numbers when you can work with small ones?