



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(440) Suit Play – Support Points**

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Level: 4 of 10 (1 of 6)

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#### **General**

High card points are a good starting point for evaluating our hand, but we can do better. Adding adjustments for length points and poorly located honors (before the auction begins) is a good way to improve our evaluation, but we should not settle for that being good enough. We should continue to adjust how we measure the playing strength of our hand as we get more information from the auction. When we find a fit with partner and know that we are going to play in a suit contract (Major suit fit most of the time) then we can further re-evaluate our hand adding points for shortness. Shortness allows us to ruff partner's losers. This ruffing is primarily valuable when the ruffing is done in the "short trump side". This means that our hand gains value when we are supporting partner's suit – thus we call these extra values for shortness *support points*. Let's see how we calculate this additional playing strength and betting bid our hand.

#### **Re-Evaluating Hand with a Fit**

We play best in a suit contract when we have a fit. This is at least 8 cards in a suit, between our hand and partner's. A common bridge saying is "*Fit is King!*" for good reason. The larger fit we have, the more tricks we can take on offense, often even with very few HCP. Many of our modern bidding tools are designed to help us look for fits and to determine the size of our fit more accurately. The larger our fit, the more points we will add to our hand when we re-evaluate. Conversely, when we have a misfit (shortness in partner's suit) we will subtract points from our hand and be more conservative about our bidding.

When we have a fit and are likely to play in a suit contract (not headed towards 3NT), then we have an additional adjustment we can make to our hand – these are called "*shortness points*", "*support points*", or "*ruffing values*." To upgrade for these shortness points we need to have the following aspects to our hand:

- A fit with partner.
- Shortness in a side suit.
- Be the short side of the trump fit (In a 4-4 fit both sides count as the short side.)



Once we have all of these items, we can upgrade our hand. We usually add these support points to our hand as:

- 2 points for a singleton
- 3 points for a void

*Example 1*

♠ A84

♥ 98542

♦ 3

♣ KQ98

If partner opens 1♠, we re-evaluate our 9 HCP and upgrade to 11 total points. We make a limit raise (either by jumping to 3♠ or starting with 1NT and later bidding 3♠).

As our fit becomes larger, we gain more ruffing values and need to add even more support points. This is especially true for voids and singletons. Thus, in 9-card fit situations (especially a 5-4 fit), many players add points as follows:

- 3 points for a singleton
- 5 points for a void

These adjustments to our HCP are just approximations of the playing strength of our hand because the actual usefulness of our shortness will vary based on partner's holding in our short suit. (The more points partner has there, the worse the hand is likely to play.)

*Note: Splinters are an extremely useful tool in modern bidding because by showing our fit, shortness, and values, we allow partner to re-evaluate our hands more precisely.*

*Example 2*

♠ A983

♥ T976

♦ 5

♣ AQT2

When we picked up this hand, we have only 10 HCP (and no adjustments). But if partner opens the bidding 1♠, then with our 4-card ♠ support, 2 Aces, and singleton, we have plenty of points to force to game. We can jump to 4♦ as a splinter, showing our game forcing values (10 HCP and 3 support points) with 4+card ♠ support and singleton or void in ♦.

The more trump we have in the short side, the more of partner's losers they will be able to ruff. With larger fits (10+cards) we may choose to add even more support points for a singleton or void.



## Conclusion

When we are re-evaluating our hand for shortness we do so when that shortness allows us to trump some of the losers in the side that we are “setting up”. Since we usually set up the long trump side, that means that we trump our losers in the short trump side. The short trump side is the side that is often supporting partner’s suit – so we call these shortness points support points. We do not want to count extra values for our shortness if it is in the long trump side. Remember to re-evaluate your hand for this shortness and to give yourself more shortness points the larger your trump fits.