Zar Points

Aggressive Bidding Hand Evaluation

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To my daughter Marina, whose interest

in the wonderful game of bridge inspired

all this research

Zar

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Part One

Never Miss a Game Again

Never miss a game again – Zar Points Bidding

Never miss a game again? That's easy – simply bid a game on every board :-) While Bob Hamman's note that "Bidding is only 3% of the game of bridge" may be true, if you don't bid your games you certainly cannot catch up by making 13 tricks with brilliant play at your 2 ♠contract, while your not-so-brilliant opponents make only 10 tricks at their 4 ♠contract. The experts know that, though – and they bid "aggressive" games that "somehow, magically" turn out to be cold. Experts use their expert judgment which advanced and intermediate players just don't have yet. This article presents the tool for the advanced and intermediate players to get this expert-level "aggressive" judgment and never miss a game again – be it a "somehow-magical" or just a "regular, plain" contract, and to stop at a part-score when no game is in sight.

1) The Opening

The Zar-Points theory is a result of exhaustive research of hundreds and hundreds of "aggressive" game contracts bid by world-class experts like Hamman, Wolff, Meckwell, Lauria, DeFalco, Zia, Helgemo, Chagas, Sabine Auken, Karen McCallum (I have great respect for the women experts) and many others at various world-class tournaments.

Following the 80-20 rule, hand evaluation is 80% Initial evaluation and 20% evaluation adjustment as the bidding progresses. The initial evaluation (just as you pick up your cards and have a look at what's in there) captures the three standard important aspects of every hand: the shape, the controls, and the standard (Milton Works 4-3-2-1) HCP. The re-evaluation covers the placement of the honors and the suit-lengths in the light of partner's and opponents' bidding.

Here is the simple quick description of the initial hand evaluation (Zar Points or Zars).

Calculating the Zar Points has 2 parts – calculating the **High-card Points (HP)** and the **Distribution Points (DP)**.

For the **high-card points** we use the 6-4-2-1 scheme which adds the sum of your **controls** (A=2, K=1) to your standard Milton HCP, in the 4-3-2-1 scheme (A=4, K=3, Q=2, J=1). You will see **WHY** we have adopted this HP counting in the second part of the article, but the short answer is: NOT because "we feel that this is the best way" :-)

Calculating **distribution points** is not news in Bridge – Charles Goren introduced the Goren Points more than half-a-century ago. It counts 3 points for every void, 2 points for every singleton, and 1 point for every doubleton. You understand, of course, that indirectly it also holds implicit valuation for the long suits, since the sum of all the 4 lengths is 13 – so, for example, the flat 4-3-3-3 distribution gives you 0 Goren distribution points, while with 5-5 two-suiter you get 3 Goren points (either 2+1 for a singleton and a doubleton or 3 for a void).

As we are going to see, there are only **39** different possible distributions in a bridge hand. To get a feel of the enormous amount of hands these 39 "types" of distribution represent, just asks yourself how many deals are there, in which YOU, sitting in the dealer's position (East, throughout this article) get a **13-0-0-0 distribution**. So – how many do you think?

The answer may surprise you –

337, 912, 392, 291, 465, 600

DIFFERENT deals in which you'll have 13-0-0-0 distribution - the LEAST probable distribution! How about the MOST probable distribution of 4-4-3-2? You guessed it – "a bit more":-). You probably know by now that the number of all possible deals in bridge is

53, 644, 737, 765, 488, 792, 839, 237, 440, 000

and the goal of the Distribution Evaluation Methods is to put some order in this enormous amount of "material".

If we focus our attention on a single hand, rather than all 4 hands constituting a deal, the numbers certainly are many orders of magnitude smaller. The total amount of hands you can have in bridge is only

635, 013, 559, 600

– a number you can handle much better, I guess – at least in terms of pronunciation :-)

From all the numbers above, the most important one is probably the number **337, 912, 392, 291, 465, 600 –** the number of possible different deals in which you have a 13-0-0-0 distribution. Why, you may ask – because it engenders the importance of **re-evaluation**. Since there are so many deals in which you hold the "stiffest" distribution, you know that the number of deals for a FIXED "more normal" distribution are orders of magnitude bigger and you have to re-evaluate your hand in the light of the guidance given you by the line of bidding presented at the table, thus **adjusting your hand in this enormous space**.

Now that we know what we are up against, let's continue with the way Zar Points are assigned to different distributions. Let's start with the initial evaluation as you pick up your cards. Here is what you do. You add:

- The High-card Zar points (**HC**) you are already very familiar with (Milton **HCP** + **Controls** or 6-4-2-1)
- The **difference** between the lengths of the Longest and the Shortest suits (we call it **S2**)
- The **sum** of the lengths of the Longest 2 suits (we call it **L2**);

That's all: **HC + S2 + L2.**

Why the difference **S2** between the longest and the shortest suit, though? For simplicity, let's denote your longest suit with a, the second longest with b, the 3rd with c, and the shortest suit – with d. This means that the following 3 hands have a 5-3-3-2 distribution with a=5, b=3, c=3, d=2:

♠ A x x x x ♥ K x x ♦ K J x ♣ x x	♠ K x x ♥ A x x ♦ x x ♣ K J x x x	♠ Q x ♥ x x x ♦ A K x x x ♣ J x x

Now, the reality of Zar Points is that we add **ALL the 3 differences** of your suits:

$$(a - b) + (b - c) + (c - d).$$

But wait … look what happens when you drop the parenthesis – both b and c disappear and the expression becomes **very simple**:

$$(a - d)$$

So: **The entire amount of the Distributional Zar Points is:**

(a + b) + (a – d)

It looks like the suit "c" doesn't participate in the Zar Points calculations, but this is illusive, as you can see from the simple algebraic manipulation that lead us to the (a + b) + (a – d). If we continue a bit with the algebraic manipulations, we get:

(a + b) + (a - d) = a + b + c + d - c - d + a - d = 13 + a - c - 2d = (13 - 2d) + (a - c)

If it is easier for you, you may calculate the Distributional Zar Points from the formula (13 – 2d) + (a – c).

Or make some other manipulation that would better suit your memory. To me, **(a+b) + (a-d)** is simple enough.

The flat 4-3-3-3 distribution has the minimum amount of Distributional Zar Points, (4 + 3) + (4 – 3) = **8** points, while the 7-6-0-0 has (7 + 6) + (7 – 0) = 20, for example. If you increase the length of the longest suit, the valuation also increases, of course – 9-4-0-0 has (9 + 4) + (9 – 0) = 22, and the wildest 13-0-0-0 hand gets the max of (13 + 0) + (13 – 0) = **26.**

So you have calculated the **HP portion** first, and then have added the **DP portion** for the Distributional Zars.

Now, if the sum is **26** or better, you have an **Opening Hand**. Here are some examples, to get your feet wet:

11+4+3+8=**26**	10+4+4+9=**27**	8+4+5+9=**26**	10+3+4+9=**26**	9+2+5+10=**26**	7+3+6+11=**27**
11 HCP ♠K J x x x ♥K x x ♦x x x ♣A x	**10 HCP** ♠ x ♥ K x x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x x	**8 HCP** ♠A x x x ♥A 10 x x x ♦x x x x ♣___	**10 HCP** ♠Q 10 x x ♥A x x ♦x ♣K J x x x	**9 HCP** ♠K Q x x x ♥K J x x x ♦x x x ♣___	**7 HCP** ♠ K x x x x x ♥ A x x x x ♦ x x ♣___

If Zar Points look a bit aggressive to you, let's have a look at several opening hands from the just-passed First Open European Championship in **Menton, France**.

♠ Qx ♥ AKxxx ♦ Jxxxx ♣ x	**Menton Bulletin 11:** "**Chagas**' light distributional opening bid changed matters". In fact the hand has 4 + 10 = 14 distributional Zars, plus the **9 HCP** (Qx) + 3 controls = 27 Zar Points, well into the Opening Hand range. Nothing special indeed. See the note about the implications of having two 5-card suits below.

♠ Axxx ♥ AJxxxx ♦ J ♣ xx	**Menton Bulletin 9:** **9 HCP**, after you discount the singleton J. Still Both **Duboin** and **Ludewig** opened the hand in the Open Teams. And indeed, the distribution Zars are 5 + 10 = 15 Plus the 4 controls and the 9 HCP(singl. J) = 28 Zars! Well above the opening minimum of 26.

♠ Jxxx ♥ x ♦ KQxxx ♣ KQx	**Menton Bulletin 9:** 11 HCP again, with **only 2 controls** ... but rich on distribution Zars: 4 + 9 = 13 points! The total Zars are 11 + 2 + 13 = 26, an opening hand. And indeed, Both Benito **Garozzo** and Andrew **Robson** opened the hand in the Open Teams event.

Certainly, all "**disability-combinations**" like KQ, QJ, singleton honor etc. discount the standard way.

In the same time, you get 1 "**upgrade point**" if **all** your points are concentrated within 3 suits (if you have a strong hand of 15+ HCP) or within 2 suits (if you have a "normal" opening of 11-14 HCP). In "light" opening you never get this 1-point upgrade. This upgrade actually takes care of the value added by having you honors "**in combinations**" rather than being scattered around the 4 suits.

While we are on the wave of Menton, let's give you one final "touch" in the Initial Hand Evaluation – it concerns holding the **Spade suit** – the so called "President's Suit". In border-cases, when you have **25** Zar Points, you add 1 point for holding the Spade suit. ONLY when you are at the border of opening, holding the spade suit gives you the right to add 1 Zar Point and get to the 26-Zars opening.

If you think that holding the Spade suit is of no importance, let me tell you – it may not be of any importance in cricket, but in bridge it IS ":-). Here is an example of such an opening coming again from Menton, with the To-Be-European-Champion **Eric Rodwell** being in action:

♠ AQxx ♥ Jx ♦ Axxx ♣ xxx	**Rodwell** opened 1D and as the commentator said "EW were talked out of their game by Rodwell's light opening bid...". He actually has 11 HCP (depreciates the ♥Jx but gets 1 pt back for 3-suits concentration of points) plus 4 controls for 15 points, plus the 2 + 8 = 10 **DP** for 25 Zars. When you upgrade the hand for holding the "president's suit" of spades by **1 pt,** you reach the 26.

And if you happen to actually open 1 S with 5 cards in spades, not only you put the opponents on a **defensive-bidding track**, but you also cut the entire Level-one **bidding space**.

So we see that a well-distributed hand with 8-9 HCP and 3-4 controls may easily qualify for an opening. Let's ask the more general question now: "**WHY** is it worth opening a "sub-opening" hand, and **WHEN**?"

We already mentioned that the total amount of hands you can have in bridge is 635,013,559,600. The more interesting thing to note is that all the hands with 12 HCP or more, all the way to 37 HCP, are

221,093,636,000

or 221 BILLION, while the number of hands in the short 8-11 HCP range is ... BIGGER (!) :

232,403,610,336

or 232 BILLION.

You see now that chances are **better** for holding an **8-11 hand** than to have **ANY "normal-opening"** hand. This "discovery" should persuade you to consider "light openings", even if you disregard the merits coming from the very fact that you have entered the bidding effectively **putting the opponents in a defensive bidding track**.

Let's have a closer look at the Opening Hands with 8-11 HCP and determine some **General Rules** you need to follow in case you hold an 8-11 hand, in the light of Zar Points evaluation.

Hand with 8 HCP

4333 = 8	needs10 controls = Pass
4432 = 10	needs 8 controls = Pass
5332 = 11	needs 7 controls = Pass
5422 = 12	needs 6 controls = Pass
5431 = 13	needs 5 controls = Pass
6322 = 13	needs 5 controls = Pass
5521 = 14	needs 4 controls = AA
5440 = 14	needs 4 controls = AA
6421 = 15	needs 3 controls = AA or AK

Hand with 9 HCP

4333 = 8	needs 9 controls = Pass
4432 = 10	needs 7 controls = Pass
5332 = 11	needs 6 controls = Pass
5422 = 12	needs 5 controls = Pass
5431 = 13	needs 4 controls = AA only
6322 = 13	needs 4 controls = AA only
5521 = 14	needs 3 controls = AK or AA or KKK
5440 = 14	needs 3 controls = AK or AA or KKK
6421 = 15	needs 2 controls = A or KK

Hand with 10 HCP

4333 = 8	needs 8 controls = Pass
4432 = 10	needs 6 controls = Pass
5332 = 11	needs 5 controls = Pass
5422 = 12	needs 4 controls = AA or AKK
5431 = 13	needs 3 controls = Any 3 controls
6322 = 13	needs 3 controls = Any 3 controls
5521 = 14	needs 2 controls = Any 2 controls
5440 = 14	needs 2 controls = Any 2 controls
6421 = 15	needs 1 control = K is enough

Hand with 11 HCP

4333 = 8	needs 7 controls = Pass
4432 = 10	needs 5 controls = AAK only
5332 = 11	needs 4 controls = AA or AKK
5422 = 12	needs 3 controls = AK or KKK
5431 = 13	needs 2 controls = Any 2 controls
6322 = 13	needs 2 controls = Any 2 controls
5521 = 14	needs 1 control = one K is enough
5440 = 14	needs 1 control = one K is enough
6421 = 15	needs 0 control = no need for any controls

In all PASS cases the decision is made on the fact that the point limitation cannot accommodate the needed controls, e.g. you cannot have 5 controls in 10 HCP since AAK are already 11 Milton points.

This leads us to the following summary, which is worth remembering as a general guideline, even if you are too lazy to count Zar Points because "you are playing for pleasure and fun" :-)

SUMMARY:

1) With **8** HCP - you need AT LEAST **5-5,** 6-4 or 5-4-4-0 distribution with **2 Aces**

2) With **9** HCP - you need AT LEAST **5-4-3-1** distribution with **2 Aces**

3) With **10** HCP - you need AT LEAST **5-4** distribution and corresponding controls

4) With **11** HCP - you need EITHER a **5-card suit** OR **5 controls** as a minimum

Simple-enough guidelines, I hope.

How do you deal with "Normal" opening hands with **balanced** distribution? And how do Zar Points get involved after a balanced opening of 1 NT for example (at the very end of these discussions you'll find some considerations regarding different standard systems like "Two over one", "Standard American", "Strong Club" etc., which will give you a general perspective about how Zar Points fit into **"your" current system**).

Let's consider two boards in which the opener EAST has the same hand with balanced 15 HCP, but the responder WEST holds completely different hands, although with the same amount of 12 HCP:

1)

♠ J x x ♥ J x x ♦ A K x x ♣ K J x	♠ K Q x ♥ K Q x x ♦ Q J x ♣ Q x x

Would East open the bidding to begin with? The answer is yes, because he has more than 12 HCP and it's an opening hand by any system. If the **HCP power warrants an opening by itself**, you open the bidding the way you usually do with the system you are using – most people would open 1 NT with the East hand. NOTE, that counting Zar Points with a balanced hand will NOT help you – with these 15 HCP you collect only 25 Zar Points which "formally" means you should pass.

Zar Points are geared towards **aggressive** bidding with **distributional** power rather than hands with brute HCP force and balanced hands – every pair would bid and make 3 NT on this first board with a natural and simple sequence of 1NT – 3NT (not even a Stayman used :-).

Now, the second example:

2)

♠ A J x x x ♥ A x x x x ♦ K x x ♣ ___	♠ K Q x ♥ K Q x x ♦ Q J x ♣ Q x x

Here the sequence is a bit different than 1NT – 3NT :-). Normally WEST would transfer in one of the majors and then re-bid the second major, allowing EAST to "upgrade" her K Q holdings in both majors and proceed towards the cold slam.

Let's have one more angle of **viewing the Opening Hands.**

Richard Pavlicek has a very informative website (http://www.rpbridge.net – check it out) and a good part of it is devoted to hand evaluation and opening bids.

So let's have a look at a couple of "borderline" hands presented on his website – he evaluates the hands via 4 different methods:

- Long Suit (1 point for every card of a suit over than 4-cards long);

- Goren;

- Bergen (Rule of 20);

- Pavlicek (similar to Goren, but in short suits with honors count the better of the HCP-count and the shortness-count, but not both).

Here are the 2 "borderline" hands:

1.

♠K J 8 6 5
♥A K 7
♦4 3
♣10 7 2

Long suit:	12
Short suit:	12
Rule of 20:	19
Pavlicek:	12

All four methods agree here. This hand falls short of all the requirements, so it is not an opening bid.

With Zar Points you collect 11+4+8+3 = 26 -> an **opening** bid !

Holding 4 controls makes the difference here – have a look at the ratio between the high-card points (HP) and the distribution points (DP) – 15 : 11.

2.

♠K J 10 6 5
♥A K 10
♦4 3
♣10 7 2

Long suit:	12
Short suit:	12
Rule of 20:	19
Pavlicek:	13

Pavlicek: “Holding one ace and three tens, you get one extra point in my method (compare Hand 1) so it becomes a 1 ♠ bid. By all the other methods it should be passed.”

So the only method that allows this hand to open (out of the 4 Richard examined) is his own method – the Pavlicek Points.

With Zar Points you collect 11+4+8+3 = 26 -> again into the **opening** bid area and only the Pavlicek Points open the hand.

Here the ratio between HP and DP is 15:13 – still the main reason is in the controls, despite the increased portion of the DP.

2) Which HCP count is "mathematically correct"

What kind of weight to put on the components you consider valuable is not a matter of "expert judgment", but a simple matter of **solving a series of equations with unknown coefficients** - an obviously overdetermined system of equations (you enter hundreds of equations based on the hundreds of boards you feed in, for finding the value of several of coefficients – the weights you are interested in).

It is a well-known fact that the standard 4-3-2-1 valuation IS the one that solves the system of equations when using any of the standard distribution-points systems (Goren, Bergen, etc.) and it is also known that the HCP + Controls valuation (the 6-4-2-1) is NOT a solution with the standard distribution points.

How do you create the equations for a specific board in order to calculate the "right" weights? We'll count HCP points and distribution points for void, doubleton, and singleton (kind of Goren style).

X_aces(a) + X_kings(k) + X_queens(q) + X_jacks (j) + X_void (v) + X_singl(s) + X_doubleton(d) = X_total_points_for_game

where a is the specific number of Aces in both hands of this deal, k is the specific number of kings etc.

So for the board:

♠Q 10 x x ♥A x ♦x x ♣K Q x x x	♠K J x x x ♥K x x ♦x x x ♣A x

the equation will be

X_aces * 2 + X_kings * 3 + X_queens * 2 + X_jacks * 1 + X_doubleton * 3 = X_total_points_for_game

because in the combined hands you have 2 Aces, 3 Kings, 2 Queens, 1 Jack, and 3 doubletons.

You make a collection of hundreds and hundreds of boards that have a game (4 in major) and solve the overdetermined system of equation to find the values of the unknown coefficients. Simple.

For the board above (4 Spades), if we consider the plain 4-3-2-1 Milton Works points, assigning 4 for A, 3 for K etc. and assign Goren distribution points (3 for void, 2 for singleton, and 1 for doubleton), we see that those ARE a solution for our first (and only for the time being) equation:

4*2 + 3*3 + 2*2 + 1*1 + 1*3= 8 + 9 + 4 + 1 + 3 = 25

so you have to "collect" 25 points to get a game with Milton / Goren points. The same way we have run the systems for the Zar Points which have much more variables to calculate.

While on the subject, you may come up with some "ingenious idea" that in bridge it's only the Kings and Jacks that count (because they are the "male cards" :-) and construct the corresponding equations. And you **WILL find** corresponding solutions for the coefficients – so the natural question is "Why not?" The answer is that such a solution will have **much bigger deviation** for the actual equations (well, I'll stop here :-).

We will do an exhaustive comparison between **Goren** points (of Charles Goren), **Bergen** Points (of Marty Bergen), **Drabble** Points, and **Zar** Points in the second half of this article so you'll get the picture.

You already might have guessed WHY the 4-3-2-1 valuation solves the equation system for the standard distribution-points systems while it does NOT solve the equations for the Zar points (the 6-4-2-1 is the one that does).

The reason is the relative weight of the distributional points vs. the weight of the honor points. As we have seen, the distributional Zar points range goes to 26 (for the extreme case of 13-0-0-0) while the standard distributional points range goes up to 13 at most (see below) - cannot compensate the weight of the 6-4-2-1.

Note also, that the experts know that **the 4-3-2-1 is a "twisted" solution**, meaning that it undervalues the A and K and overvalues the Q and J - that's why they use fractions to "make it work" (they count A for 4 1/2 while Q for 1 1/2, which makes three Queens equal to one A, **just like the 6-4-2-1 valuation**).

Zar points allow the natural 6-4-2-1 honor count (which experts lean towards) to be the solution of the overdetermined system of equations.

Your judgment

Do you still need to apply your judgment and consider both hands of the partnership in the bidding process? You bet. Here is a simple example which covers both cases - your own hand and the combination of the two hands in the partnership.

Let's consider two different hands in opening position, with the same 26 Initial Zar Points, 10 HCP, 3 Controls, 5-4-3-1 distribution. Which one do you like better?

North A	**North B**
♠ 8 6 5 3 2 ♥ 7 5 4 2 ♦ A Q J ♣ K	♠ A J 10 8 4 ♥ K Q 10 9 ♦ 10 9 6 ♣ 4

I guess you have a preference here :-). Certainly hand "A" will be greatly downgraded from the initial 26 Zar Points while the second hand "B" will be upgraded for a number of reasons. BUT, let's consider the Partner's hand in both cases and how this dramatically changes the picture. In both cases the partner has 27 Zar points - 10 HCP, 4 controls, 5-4-3-1 distribution.

South A	**South B**
♠ A 10 9 7 4 ♥ 9 ♦ 10 8 6 5 ♣ A Q 6	♠ K ♥ 8 7 6 ♦ A 7 4 2 ♣ K 9 7 5 3

No comment needed - you'd reverse your "preferences" and you would prefer the set "A". In bridge, you always need your head on your shoulders, at any stage of the game :-)

This brings us to the next section where we consider the adjustments to the partner's and opponents bidding.

3) The Responding

So your partner has already opened, the main consequence being that YOU are in offensive bidding while the opponents **have been already pushed in the defensive** track. How does this affect your hand evaluation?

You first do the Initial hand evaluation that has been covered in "The Opening" section and THEN make certain adjustments - adjustments to the partner's suit and adjustments to the opponents' suit. The minimum point-count that allows you to talk is **16**:

- 1 additional point for the trump honors (trump 10 counts for 1, trump A counts for 5) up to **MAX 2.**
- 1 additional point for the Invitational-second-suit honors (10 counts for 1, A counts for 5), **MAX 2**.

The total allowance here is two, whether 2, 3, 4 or 5 are held (the rest goes away as 'duplication values'). So how do you judge the level you are ready to play at? Here are the **Game calculations:**

- 52 Zars for Game at level 4 (two opening hands make a game),
- 57 Zars for level 5,
- 62 Zars for a slam at level 6.

Plain and simple - 5 points per level. These 5 points may come from an additional K in the partner's suit (3 points from the HCP, 1 from the control, and the premium 1 from the honor in the partner's suit), from an additional outside A (2 from the controls plus 4 from the HCP) etc.

Let's close this section with four of the **most common situations** in game bidding (the **long-suit invitation** has already been mentioned, with the re-evaluation of the responder's hand based on the 2 long suits of the opening hand).

♠Q 10 x x ♥A x ♦x x ♣K x x x x	♠K J x x x ♥K x x ♦x x x ♣A x	East has 26-count = 11 HCP + 8 Long (5+3) + 3 Short (5-2) + 4 Control = 26. West has 24 = 9 HCP + 9 Long (5+4) + 3 Short (5-2) + 3 Control = 24. E opens 1S, W corrects +1 for ♠Q + 1 for ♠10 = 26 (K trump = 4, Q trump = 3, J trump = 2, 10 trump = 1). **1 S – 4 S.** (26-30) - 52 needed for level 4. Add 10 Zars = AKx in ♦ and you get the slam (5 Zars per level).
♠Q 10 x x ♥Q x ♦x x ♣K x x x x	♠K J x x x ♥K x x ♦x x x ♣A x	East has 26-count = 11 HCP + 8 Long (5+3) + 3 Short (5-2) + 4 Control = 26. West has 20 = 7 HCP + 9 Long (5+4) + 3 Short (5-2) + 1 Control = 20. E opens 1S, W corrects +1 for ♠Q + 1 for ♠10 = 22. **1 S – 3 S.** (21-25)
♠Q 10 x x ♥x x ♦x x ♣K x x x x	♠K J x x x ♥K x x ♦x x x ♣A x	East has 26-count = 11 HCP + 8 Long (5+3) + 3 Short (5-2) + 4 Control = 26. West has 18 = 5 HCP + 9 Long (5+4) + 3 Short (5-2) + 1 Control = 18. E opens 1S, W corrects +1 for ♠Q and 1 for ♠10 = 20. **1 S – 2 S.** (16-20)
♠A Q x x ♥A x ♦x x ♣K x x x x	♠K J x x x ♥K x x ♦x x x ♣A x	East has 26-count = 11 HCP + 8 Long (5+3) + 3 Short (5-2) + 4 Control = 26. West has 30 = 13 HCP + 9 Long (5+4) + 3 Short (5-2) + 5 Control = 30. East opens 1S, West corrects +1 for ♠Q + 1 for ♠A = 32. **1 S – 2 NT.** (31+) - Long raise version of Jacoby 2NT. If E has only Axx in ♦, this will bring 6 additional points and slam (**62 min** for slam)

It is worth noting that initially we had the responding level at 18 rather than 16, but after some additional experiments the responding level was adjusted to 16, which fits perfectly with the "5 points per level" calculations. So, let's say the opener has 26 and opens 1♠, while the responder has 16 and bids 2♠. Now, if you put additional 5 points in each hand, this will bring the point count to the game-level of 52.

Honors Re-evaluation - Your honors are your real estate

During the initial hand valuation when you pick up your cards, it's a standard procedure to depreciate short-suit honors by a point. While the bidding progresses, you do a re-evaluation of the hand, accounting for the suits bid by your partner and your opponents.

Just remember that the three important rules for evaluating the HCP-portion of your hand match the well-known three important rules for evaluating real estate - location, location, location:

1) Location of your honors in partner's suits - add a point for each honor (10 including) to a maximum of 2 (if you have KQ10 add only 2, rather than 3).

2) Location of your honors in opponents' suits – subtract/add a point for the honors in the suits bid by the opponents depending on location of the opponent (chances are you don't have many of these, so no limit here): an AQ or Kx behind (offside) the bidder can be upgraded while QJx – downgraded respectively. The same AQ or Kx should be downgraded if you are in front of (onside) the bidding opponent.

3) Location of your "depreciated" honors in short suits - add the honors bonus points for the partner's suits while further discount the honors in short suits bid by your opponents. Doubleton QJ in the opponents' suit can be dropped to zero while in the partners suit it gets to 4 points, since the 1-point discount for 'blank honors' stays due to the inflexibility it presents in playing the suit by blocking the communications.

As the bidding progresses, you continue re-evaluating the hand in the light of both Partner's bids and the opponents bids. A suit of AQx can be upgraded to AKx if the suit is bid in front of you, while a KJx can be dropped to 1 pt if the suit is bid behind you. You use your head constantly.

Fit Re-evaluation

So for the time being we are quite happy with the **52-count** for game – it works in a vast majority of hands. The fact that we have a 6-card trump suit, for example (a good surprise to the partner who has raised the suit expecting only 5 cards) is already **factored in** via the Distributional Zar Points, calculated on the basis of our 6-card suit. Or is it?

The fact that you have a 6-card suit IS indeed factored in – what is NOT factored in is the fact that partner has raised that suit, believing that we have a **5-card** suit, which means that we have an **extended** fit.

Besides the "real estate", your distribution points also get adjusted depending on the way the two hands of the partnership match. Your initial Zar Points of 13 for a 5431 distribution are worth 13 in the beginning when NO information from the bidding is available, and may stay there if the partner has 1345 and also gets 13 points for distribution.

We have to be able to "calculate" the fact that we have extra lengths in "our" suits and the numbers that fit the calculations are:

- 3 additional HC points for any trump over the promised length, i.e. 3 additional for 5 trumps, 6 for 6 trumps.

- 3 additional HC point for any Invitational Second suit card over the length of 4 (secondary fit).

You know already that the calculations that led us to these point-assignments are based on the overdetermined system of equations with "X_superfit" additional variable, so let's only notice that these re-evaluations are in line with the "**Law of Total Tricks**", besides being actually calculated as coefficients in series of equations.

You may ask "How does it fit **The Law** when you say that 5 Zar Points constitute 1 level and you assign only 3 points for extra length?" And that would be a reasonable question. The answer is that 2 points have already been factored in by the fact that you have a 6-card suit, 1 from the (a + b) and 1 from the (a – d). And you might say "But The Law is only applicable when the **HCP power is relatively-equally divided** between the opponents" – and that's true. In aggressive game-bidding situations, though, the HCP is also divided – it's the distribution and location that makes the aggressive games, so there is no controversy here either.

The second question often asked is "Since we add a lot of points for super-fits, don't we have to change the minimum limits of **52 for a Game and 62 for a Slam**?" The answer is "No", you simply will be able to arrive at more subtle (or "aggressive" if you like this word better) games and slams, while still getting at the more normal "every-day" ones.

The two good things that may happen when evaluating how well the hands match together are:

1) you have one fit, but it is a super-fit, i.e. around 10+ cards in the suit.

2) you don't have a super-fit, but you have double fits, one 8+ cards, and another 7+ cards.

Here is how you re-evaluate the hands in terms of additional Zar Points for the main fit:

9th card - **3** pt;

10th card - **6** pt, i.e. a 10-card fit brings you 3+3 = 6 points total just from the length.

11th card - **9** pt, i.e. an 11-card fit brings you 3x3 = 9 additional points from length.

For additional information on The **Law of Total Tricks** see Larry Cohen's excellent books on that subject.

Zar Ruffing Power Calculation – The Law of Total Tricks revisited

This is the **"blind value"** of the additional trumps, though. Can we do something better here? Does it matter if these additional trumps can contribute to additional tricks or if their power is limited to "taking trumps out of defenders' hands".

Have a look at these two hands in which you have 5 trumps (spades) and your partner has opened 1 spade.

Hand A has distribution 5-0-4-4 while hand B has distribution 5-3-3-2.

Hand A	**Hand B**
♠ A 10 9 7 4 ♥ ___ ♦ 10 8 6 5 ♣ A 9 6 3	♠ A 10 9 7 4 ♥ J 7 6 ♦ K 7 ♣ K 8 3

Granted, the difference is somewhat reflected in the (a + b) + (a – d) calculation, but **this was before spades** were named **trumps!** Both hands have 26 Zar Points, 4 controls, and 5 trumps, but are **these 2 additional** trumps worth the same in both hands? You see the point.

I guess you would prefer hand A despite the fact that it has 8 HCP and 5 trumps, while hand B has 10 HCP and 5 trumps. The reason is in the **"Zar Ruffing Power".**

Instead of assigning 3 points for every additional trump over the combined length of 8 regardless of distribution, we assign the entire amount of 3 points per trump only "some times :-) Here is how you calculate the "Zar Ruffing Power" of the additional trumps you have.

You add **(3-d) points for every trump** over the combined length of 8, where d is the usual shortest suit in your hand. If you have a 4-3-3-3 hand, your additional trumps are worthless – you get **(3-d) = 3-3 = 0**, besides the fact that you have already taken into account this length in the initial Zar Points calculations. If you have a singleton, you get (3-1) = 2 Zar Points for every additional trump.

But wait! Can we find an easier form of **the (3-d) rule**? Look what it actually boils down to:

- Assign **3 points for every trump** above the combined length of 8 if your shortest suit is **void**.
- Assign **2 points for every trump** above the combined length of 8 if your shortest suit is **singleton**.
- Assign **1 point for every trump** above the combined length of 8 if your shortest suit is **doubleton.**

Sounds familiar?

Yes, these are the **Goren** Points for distribution, but applied only for the **extra-trump-holdings**, and applied for **every**-trump above 8. So, the 2 additional trumps of hand A are worth 2x3 = 6 Zar Points, while the same 2 additional trumps in Hand B are worth only 2x1 = 2 Zar Points.

Here is an important note on the Zar Ruffing Power calculations. You can calculate and add the points for a **single** additional trump even if you gave just the regular fit that your bid shows **(no superfit)**, provided there is a difference of **at least 2 between your trump length and your shortest suit**. So if you have 4 trumps and a side singleton and you have raised your partner's 4-card suit, you still can count 2 points (that's 3-1); same with 3 trumps if you have raised your partner's 5-card major – you count (3-1) = 2 points for the singleton. However, with 3 trumps and a doubleton you do not get the 1 point since the difference in lengths is only 1. We have tested these intensively and so could you. This adjusted calculation takes care of many competitive bidding situations where you have to judge what to do.

You realize that this brings new light to the **Law of Total Tricks** – it allows you to **fine-tune** your actions instead of blindly calculating the total trump lengths.

For additional developments of the The Law of Total Tricks, see the last couple of sections in the second part of this article, called "The Finer Arts of Zar Points"

How much is your 6-card suit worth

Having discussed the value of double-fit and super-fit, let's pick the following common hand with a 5-card Major suit:

♠ Jxx
♥ KQJxx
♦ AQx
♣ xx

You open 1H and partner raises to 2H, opponents pass carelessly.

What do you do? And how would your decision change if you hold a 6-card Heart suit? Pretty common question, you would agree.

We hold 13 HCP with 3 controls for a total of 16 points, plus the 11 from distribution (3+8) for a total of 27. An opening hand, as we have already opened it, but nothing more than that – so we PASS.

Let's get ONLY one non-trump card and move it to the hearts, making the Hearts a 6-card suit. How does that change the situation?

Here is how. You guessed it - it depends :-)

Depends on where you get this 6th card from. If you get from the doubleton, you make the hand 6-3-3-1 and the distributional Zars jump from 11 to 14, plus the 3 points for a 6-th trump (1 more than promised by the bid) for a total of 33 points - enough for Game Try since **you support the level 3** alone. So you bid 2S (invitation), asking partner for help in this suit.

If you move the card from the Jxx, the distribution would be 6-3-2-2 for a jump from 11 to 13. Plus you add 3 pt for the 6th suit and drop a point for the resulting Jx which gets your total from 27 to 31 - still most probably PASS, unless pushed in a competitive bidding.

You see the meaning the Zar Ruffing Power calculations now.

Same if you get the 6-th card from the AQx - you'll need to make 1 point deduction for the AQ blank, adding 3 for the 6th suit, leaving you again with a total of 31 – PASS, unless in competition.

How easy and simple it is - if you can count to 32 - Game try. If you can count to 36 – Game. If you have only a point of two extra – just let it go. You can see how things change if you move 2 cards around and make the hand 6-4-2-1 or 7-3-2-1 and you would act accordingly.

Just one more hand on the 6-card major suit theme:

♠ Jxxxxx
♥ xx
♦ AQx
♣ AQ

Again you open 1 S and partner bids 2S. The hand is from the exceptional book of **Jeff Meckstroth** "Win the Bermuda Bowl with Me" - this book should be your choice if you are under the severe financial restriction to buy only one bridge book :-)

Jeff's view is that this hand is only worth a game try. Let's see what "the calculator" would tell us. We have 13 HCP and 4 controls, for a total of 17 points, plus the 9 + 4 = 13 distributive Zars (the 1 point for holding the **Spades suit** only counts when you make a borderline decision "to open or not to open") for a total of 30.

If you are lazy and want to use the 3-points-per-additional trump rule, you add the 3 points for the 6th suit you reach a total of 33 - enough for game try (5 Zars are 1 level of bidding). To jump directly to 4-level you need 36+, as already discussed. If you use the **Zar Ruffing Power** rule, than you add only 1 point because your shortest suit is doubleton and get 31 points – even lower that before.

Turns out Jeff is right again :-)

4) The Aggression

So do you have to be aggressive or conservative in bridge? I hope you know the answer to that question - it's **both**.

Karen McCallum said once "I've never passed a hand with a void in my life", and when you think about it, a hand with a void already has **at least** 14 Zars from the S2 and L2 components (as opposed to the only 8 points that a flat 4-3-3-3 hand would give you – a minimum of **6 points** difference). Put a couple of Aces for another 12 Zars (2 times 4 HCP plus 2 CT) and you have a hand with 8 HCP but with 26 Zars!!! Opening hand with 8 "standard" points!

Here is an example of the "Two opening hands make a game" rule in the old-fashioned HCP style and the Zar-style.

First - the **common question** "to game or not to game" with 24 HCP, with standard bidding (Std) and Zar Points (Zar):

♠Q x x x ♥Q J x ♦Q J ♣K J x x	K J 10 x x K x x K x Q x x	**Std:** East has 12-count with a good 5-card , West has 4-card support in and 12 HCP, both opening hands, but not a chance for either 4 or 3 NT (the defense will switch in sooner or later). **Zar:** East has 12+3+3+8 = 26 points (bare opening) while West has 12+1+2+8=23, not an opening hand even with the correction +1 for the Q of spades. That is support to 3 ♣(49 Zars, 52 needed for a game).

Now, the above mentioned **"Karen-style"** approach to the "to open or not to open" question, again Std vs. Zar:

♠K Q x x x ♥K J x x x ♦x x x ♣___	♠A x x x ♥A 10 x x x ♦x x x x ♣___	**Std:** East has 8 HCP and West has 9 HCP with not-so-wild distribution - nobody has a suit longer than 5-cards! Admit it – you would pass BOTH hands! **Zar:** East has 8+4+9+5 = 26 Zars. West has 9+2+10+5=26 Zars. BOTH opening hands! And two opening hands make a game. The result - Cold 4 ♥

I am sure you have already noticed that if you switch the ♣ and ♦ in EITHER hand (but not both :-) it's a **GRAND**! A GRAND SLAM that you would simply have as an ALL-PASS board!

Wouldn't that be a shame even for Bob Hamman (arguably the most experienced bridge player on Earth) with his 3% on bidding - if only he'd have an ALL-PASS board here, though… I am sure he wouldn't and that's simply because his 3% are NOT your 3%! Now you have the tool to come closer to Bob's 3%.

Looks strange, but … only if you are still judging and evaluating the hands based on HCP and "vague feel" about things like shape, controls, distribution, offensive power, suit-support, etc. – all of which come into account with the Zar Points evaluation system.

You only have to be able to **count to 26** and confidently open the bidding.

To finish the "aggressive opening" subject, we just have to show what **REAL AGGRESSIVE** actually is. Some readers have already noticed the hand in the beginning of the article suggesting opening with 7 HCP. This sounds kind of crazy, I hear you mumbling.

Let's explore this avenue a bit, though - is this the limit? Here are several hands that will provide the answer to that:

7+3+6+11=**27**	6+2+6+12=**26**	5+1+7+13=**26**	4+2+7+13=**26**
7 HCP ♠ K x x x x x ♥ A x x x x ♦ x x ♣___	**6 HCP** ♠ K x x x x x ♥ K x x x x x ♦ x ♣___	**5 HCP** ♠K x x x x x x ♥Q x x x x x ♦ ___ ♣___	**4 HCP** ♠10 x x x x x x ♥A x x x x x ♦ ___ ♣___

Wow ... **an opening hand with 4 HCP** ????

Well ... you probably like "calmer" hands, like 4-4-3-2 with 8 HCP that anyone in the world (me including :-) will pass:

8 HCP
♠A J x x ♥K x x x ♦x x ♣x x x

Do you see where I am heading?

8 HCP	**4 HCP**
♠A J x x ♥K x x x ♦x x ♣x x x	♠10 x x x x x x ♥A x x x x x ♦ ___ ♣___

It's a **GRAND** my friend, if trumps drop 1:1.

Do you play bridge? :-)

5) The Restrictions

What restrictions?

Good question.

Many Bridge Federations, though, impose restrictions on your bidding, some of them to a point where you don't know what kind of a game you are playing anymore ... (hey, it's all 'games' :-)

I don't want to get into discussions about the restrictions ACBL is imposing, but would rather consider a more moderate "average" set of restrictions like the ones the French Bridge Federation - "Fédération Française de Bridge" imposes on the bridge events under its rules:

"An opening of one of a suit can be made ONLY under the rule of 18 (HCP+a+b), 16 in third seat".

That's like Marty Bergen's Rule of 20, only kept to 18 in 1st and 2nd seat, and lowered to 16 in 3rd seat.

Note, that this is the rule of the EBL too (**European Bridge League).**

Let's see what happens with our "sub-light" openings with 7, 6, 5, 4 HCP respectively.

The 7 HCP hand -> 7 HCP + 6 + 5 = 18

The 6 HCP hand - > 6 HCP + 6 + 6 = 18

The 5 HCP hand - > 5 HCP + 7 + 6 = 18

The 4 HCP hand - > 4 HCP + 7 + 6 = 17

So - **all these openings** are just **fine** and dandy, according to the "average" National Federation restrictions, much to the surprise of some people.

I hope you are not one of them anymore.

Let's have a look at the **WBF definition of an opening hand**. The WBF doesn't define an opening hand in terms of Goren Points, or Bergen Points, or **(nota bene)** even in terms of Milton Work HCP!

The rule actually says that an opening hand is a hand "**better than the average hand with a Queen worth!**

This means that basically regardless of how you measure the hands, an opening hand is a Queen better than the average.

So, let's measure the average Zar Points hand. For comparison, and average HCP-measured hand is a hand with 10 HCP points. Hence, an opening hand in Milton Work sense is a hand with 10 + 2 = 12 HCP.

The average hand in terms of 6-4-2-1 Honor Points contains 6+4+2+1 = **13 points.** Now, for the Distributive Portion, we have to go to the each distribution and multiply the Zar Points it brings with the probability this distribution to occur. Then, when we add-up all the results, we'll come up with the average Zar Points distributional hand.

So, let's just do it.

Hand Distributions with their Probabilities and Zar Points assigned			
4-3-3-3 = 10.5% 8 ZP	6-4-2-1 = 4.7% 15 ZP	8-2-2-1 = 0.19% 17 ZP	10-1-1-1 = 0.0004, 20ZP
4-4-3-2 = 21.5% 10 ZP	6-4-3-0 = 1.3% 16ZP	8-3-1-1 = 0.12% 18 ZP	10-2-1-0 = 0.0011, 22ZP
4-4-4-1 = 3.0% 11 ZP	6-5-1-1 = 0.7% 16 ZP	8-3-2-0 = 0.10% 19 ZP	10-3-0-0 = 0.0002, 23ZP
	6-5-2-0 = 0.6% 17 ZP	8-4-1-0 = 0.045 20 ZP	
5-3-3-2 = 15.5% 11 ZP	6-6-1-0 = 0.1% 18 ZP	8-5-0-0 = 0.003 21 ZP	11-1-1-0 = ~0
5-4-2-2 = 10.5% 12 ZP			11-2-0-0 = ~0
5-4-3-1 = 13.0% 13 ZP	7-2-2-2 = 0.51% 14 ZP	9-2-1-1 = 0.02% 19 ZP	
5-4-4-0 = 1.3% 14 ZP	7-3-2-1 = 1.88% 16 ZP	9-2-2-0 = 0.01% 20 ZP	12-1-0-0 = ~0
5-5-2-1 = 3.2% 14 ZP	7-3-3-0 = 0.26% 17 ZP	9-3-1-0 = 0.01% 21 ZP	13-0-0-0 = ~0
5-5-3-0 = 0.9% 15 ZP	7-4-1-1 = 0.39% 17 ZP	9-4-0-0 = 0.001 22 ZP	
	7-4-2-0 = 0.36% 18 ZP		
6-3-2-2 = 5.6% 13 ZP	7-5-1-0 = 0.10% 19 ZP		
6-3-3-1 = 3.5% 14 ZP	7-6-0-0 = 0.006 20 ZP		

Here are the calculations:

(longest suit 4) 84 + 215 + 33 …….. = 332
(longest suit 5) 170 + 126 + 169 + 18 + 45 + 13 …. = 541
(longest suit 6) 73 + 50 + 70 + 21 + 11 + 10 + 2 …… = 237
(longest suit 7) 7 + 31 + 4 + 7 + 6 + 2 + 0.1 ……... = 57
(longest suit 8) 3 + 2 + 2 + 1 + 0.1 …….. = 8
(longest suit 9) 0.4 + 0.2 + 0.2 + 0.1 ……= 1

for a total of 1176, which after dividing by 100 to convert the %, comes to approximately 11 Points.

So, **the average Zar Points hand contains 13 + 11 = 24 Zar Points.**

This in turn means that a **Zar Points opening hand of 26** is a **Queen-worth (2 points) better** than the **average hand which has 24 Zar Points.**

Hence, according to **the World Bridge Federation,** AND the "average" **National Bridge Federation standards,** AND the **European Bridge Federation Standard Zar Points OPENING HAND** definition of having 26 Zar Points **is perfectly OK.**

It is interesting to note that all the 3 methods - Goren, Bergen, and Zar - **fit EXACTLY the minimal** conditions imposed by the World Bridge federation. Since the "average" hand has 5-3-3-2 distribution with 10 HCP, here are the three calculations:

1) **Goren** gets 10 for the HCP plus 1 for the doubleton = 11 Goren Points for the average hand - a Queen-worth from the **opening bar of 13** Goren Points.

2) **Bergen** gets 10 for the HCP plus 8 for the 2 longest suits = 18 – again exactly a Queen-worth from the **opening bar of 20** Bergen Points.

3) **Zar** gets 10 + 3 = 13 for the HCP + Controls, plus (5+3) + (5-2) = 11 for the distribution for a total of 24 Zar Points - a Queen-worth from the **opening bar of 26** Zar Points.

Before leaving this section, let's prove that Zar Points provide a Monotonic Linear Evaluation with a step equal to "One-Jack-Worth".

1) We will prove that Zar Points are **Monotonic** and **Linear** regarding the length changes throughout the 4 suits a, b, c, and d:

First, let's prove the linearity in the case of moving a card up-wards the suite, from d through a.

Moving a card from **d to c**:
(a) + (b) + [a - (d-1)] = (a+b) + (a-d) + 1

Moving a card from **c to b**:
(a) + (b+1) + (a - d) = (a+b) + (a-d) + 1

Moving a card from **b to a**:
(a+1) + (b-1) + (a+1 - d) = (a+b) + (a-d) + 1

Now, moving cards downwords, from a through d.

Moving a card from **a to b**:
(a-1) + (b+1) + (a-1 - d) = (a+b) + (a-d) - 1

Moving a card from **b to c**:
(a) + (b-1) + (a - d) = (a+b) + (a-d) - 1

Moving a card from **c to d**:
(a) + (b) + [a - (d+1)] = (a+b) + (a-d) - 1

So the difference is 1 point REGARDLESS of where you take a card from and move it to the next suit in the a, b, c, and d suits of the bridge hand.

2) Every movement in distribution by 1 card from one of the suits ordered by length to the next is **worth one Jack.**

This stems from the fact that the 1-point-difference proven above is equal to the 1 point that Zar Points assign to a Jack.

So Zar Points provide a **Monotonic Linear Evaluation** with a step equal to **"One-Jack-Worth".**

6) The Anti-aggression

So the aggression can go as low as 4 HCP in the extreme case of 7-6-0-0.

Let's see how far we can push the things in the opposite direction. This is to say, what is the HIGHEST amount of HCP which **formally** does not allow you to open (in terms of Zar Points), despite the already stressed fact that with 12+ HCP you **will open** from "brute force power" considerations. The fact that Zar Points formally do not give you the green light to open, presents you with the Zar Points **"orientation correction"**, explained in this section.

You certainly understand that we are talking about balanced hands here, rather than wild two-suiters. And we have already touched upon the issue of balanced hands bidding in the very first section of this article, so you know that with balanced hands basically what matters is brute force. Is that the whole picture, though?

To set up the stage, let us consider the following board. You are West and your partner opens 1 NT. You are playing a "special" 1 NT opening (for the sake of the discussion, obviously) ONLY with **exactly 14 HCP**, and **4-4 in Majors,** and **balanced 4-4-3-2 distribution**, and the **doubleton being in** ♣ (hey, I am good at creating bidding systems :-)

Admit it - I am giving you **more** information than you would have hoped for. Here is your hand:

7 HCP ♠K x x x x ♥A x x x x ♦x x ♣x

So ... what do you want to play? Any "scientific" ideas here? :-)

Face it – you'll scratch your head and shoot in the dark.

To show you what kind of a fog of uncertainty you are manipulating in, here are 2 normal possible 1 NT hands:

14 HCP, balanced 4-4-3-2 hand ♠A x x x ♥K x x x ♦A K x ♣x x
14 HCP, balanced 4-4-3-2 hand ♠Q J x x ♥K Q J x ♦Q J x ♣Q x

So - **slam** or **part-score**, this is the question :-) It's **3 Levels difference** we are talking about here in this innocent example - slam with the first and part-score with the second …

Aggression or Anti-aggression, hitting the brakes :-)

You see the difference between having 6 Controls vs. having 1 Control. The first hand has **5 more controls** than the second one, meaning it has 5 more Zar Points, everything else **equal**! This brings the valuation for the first balanced hand to 14 + 6 + 8 + 2 = **30** points, while the second one has 14 + 1 + 8 + 2 = **25**. So the first hand is at the border of having one additional level "in excess" while the second one doesn't even have a formal opening in terms of Zar Points – you will open it just from "brute force" consideration.

Now we are ready to get back to our original question of how far we can push the "non-opening" hand, the quotation marks being there to stress the fact that you will open these hands because of the brute HCP power of 12+ HCP, but **open them "carefully, with caution**", meaning that:

1) you would pass at the first chance presented, and second,
2) you would push the hand toward NT (see the "**orientation**" remarks below).

Here are the hands, this time in ascending order of HCP:

12+2+8+3=**25** **12 HCP** ♠Q J x x x ♥K x ♦Q J x ♣K x x	13+1+8+3=**25** **13 HCP** ♠K Q x x x ♥Q J x ♦Q x ♣Q J x	14+1+8+2=**25** **14 HCP** ♠Q J x x ♥Q x ♦Q J x ♣K Q J x	15+2+7+1=**25** **15 HCP** ♠K J x x ♥K Q x ♦Q J x ♣Q J x

The important distinction to notice and remember is presented in the following table:

Balanced Distribution	Maximum "non-opening" HCP
4-3-3-3	15
4-4-3-2	14
5-3-3-2	13

Now you know what kind of **focus** to have when dealing with balanced hands against suit-oriented hands. Zar Points divide the balanced hands in the low-HCP-level (12-15 HCP) in two groups.

The first group is "**max 3** controls". The second group is "**min 4** controls". This presents you with another evaluation parameter called "**orientation**" of the low-HCP-level balanced hand – NT or trump. It serves as your "halogen lights" in the fog of uncertainly that balanced hands present.

7) The Pre-empts

Now that we know that Level-1 "normal" opening can happen with as low as 4 HCP, you probably think that pre-empts can go to as low as a 1-2 HCP !

Sorry to disappoint you - you are not even close ...

The "general" rules of the "standard" bidding you know about, basically states that for "normal" opening you have to have about 12 HCP while for a weak-2 opening you need 8 HCP and a relatively good 6-card suit.

So, for a weak-2 pre-empt you need 2/3 of the minimum for normal Level-1 bid.

Things with Zar Points bidding are more conservative - you need **between 22 and 25 Zar Points** and a descent 6-card suit.

The main message you communicate there is "I don't have the 26 points for a normal opening, but I have a decent 6-card suit and between 22 and 25 Zar Points."

Here is a typical hand you would open 2 with, basically in any system:

♠ Kxx
♥ KQJxxx
♦ xxx
♣ x

Let's see what happens in Zar Points. You get 9 + 2 = 11 for the HCP and Controls, and 9 + 5 for the 6-3-3-1 distribution for a total of 25 Zar Points - not enough for opening at Level-1.

How about pre-empts at level 3 and 4? Again the main message is "I don't have 26 points, but I do have a decent 7 or 8-card suit respectively, so you evaluate your hand respectively".

But why does the limit of a "normal" opening go as low as 4 HCP, while pre-empts virtually do not drop below 7 HCP? The answer is simple - **playing power** and **limitations** of the hand.

With pre-empts you virtually declare uni-suit with not much potential for variations and re-evaluation of the hand - you basically say "**That's all I have**".

With the normal opening sky is the limit.

8) The Comparison

We will assess the accuracy of **four different methods** of bridge distribution evaluation via some standard common mathematical approaches.

The first one is the already mentioned Charles **Goren**'s system, known as the "3-2-1" system, named after the points assigned for short-suits holdings.

The second method is the Marty **Bergen's** "Rule of 20" method from his famous book-series "Points Schmoints". The approach of Bergen is to assign points equal to the sum of the lengths of the 2 longest suits of a hand, i.e. (a+b), using our notation.

We will also compare with the newest method from the late 90-ies, the **Drabble** rule of "adding the 2 longest suits, divide by 3, and subtract the length of the shortest suit, rounding downwards. Since Drabble's scale starts with -1 for the 4-3-3-3, we have adjusted it by shifting the entire table with (+1) to eliminate the negative numbers.

In all cases we consider the initial base points, before the "fine tuning" in one way or another.

The fourth method is the **Zar** distribution Points method you are already familiar with - assigning the value of (a+b) + (a-d), i.e. the sum of your 2 longest suits, plus the difference between your longest and your shortest suit (effectively representing the SUM of all the 3 suit-differences of the hand).

As we mentioned, there are 39 different suit-distributions in a bridge hand.

The table below covers them, along with the probability of their occurrence:

Hand Distributions with their Probabilities			
4-3-3-3 = 10.5%	6-4-2-1 = 4.7%	8-2-2-1 = 0.19%	10-1-1-1 = ~0
4-4-3-2 = 21.5%	6-4-3-0 = 1.3%	8-3-1-1 = 0.12%	10-2-1-0 = ~0
4-4-4-1 = 3.0%	6-5-1-1 = 0.7%	8-3-2-0 = 0.10%	10-3-0-0 = ~0
	6-5-2-0 = 0.6%	8-4-1-0 = ~0	
5-3-3-2 = 15.5%	6-6-1-0 = 0.1%	8-5-0-0 = ~0	11-1-1-0 = ~0
5-4-2-2 = 10.5%			11-2-0-0 = ~0
5-4-3-1 = 13.0%	7-2-2-2 = 0.51%	9-2-1-1 = 0.02%	
5-4-4-0 = 1.3%	7-3-2-1 = 1.88%	9-2-2-0 = 0.01%	12-1-0-0 = ~0
5-5-2-1 = 3.2%	7-3-3-0 = 0.26%	9-3-1-0 = 0.01%	13-0-0-0 = ~0
5-5-3-0 = 0.9%	7-4-1-1 = 0.39%	9-4-0-0 = ~0	
	7-4-2-0 = 0.36%		
6-3-2-2 = 5.6%	7-5-1-0 = 0.10%		
6-3-3-1 = 3.5%	7-6-0-0 = ~0		

The numbers marked as ~0 are numbers less than 0.01%. It is worth noticing that the 4-3-3-3 distribution is not among the top 3 most probable distributions and that by far the most probable one is 4-4-3-2 – 6% above the second-most-probable 5-3-3-2.

The distributive part of the Zar Points varies from **8 for flat hand** to **26 for the "wildest" hand with 3 voids**. This means that it classifies the hands in **17** categories. Here they go:

Zar Distribution Points for ALL distributions			
4-3-3-3 = 8	6-4-2-1 = 15	8-2-2-1 = 17	10-1-1-1 = 20
4-4-3-2 = 10	6-4-3-0 = 16	8-3-1-1 = 18	10-2-1-0 = 22
4-4-4-1 = 11	6-5-1-1 = 16	8-3-2-0 = 19	10-3-0-0 = 23
	6-5-2-0 = 17	8-4-1-0 = 20	
5-3-3-2 = 11	6-6-1-0 = 18	8-5-0-0 = 21	11-1-1-0 = 23
5-4-2-2 = 12			11-2-0-0 = 24
5-4-3-1 = 13	7-2-2-2 = 14	9-2-1-1 = 19	
5-4-4-0 = 14	7-3-2-1 = 16	9-2-2-0 = 20	12-1-0-0 = 25
5-5-2-1 = 14	7-3-3-0 = 17	9-3-1-0 = 21	13-0-0-0 = 26
5-5-3-0 = 15	7-4-1-1 = 17	9-4-0-0 = 22	
	7-4-2-0 = 18		
6-3-2-2 = 13	7-5-1-0 = 19		
6-3-3-1 = 14	7-6-0-0 = 20		

We are going to compare the 4 methods by 3 criteria:

1) **span of base**, given by the number of the groups the method classifies the hands in;

2) **separation power**, given by the maximum number of distributions which can fall in a single group;

3) **standard deviation**, which is explained below in the article.

To prepare for this exercise, we will present the following table with the points assigned by all four evaluation methods:

Zar Points	Bergen Points	Goren 3-2-1 Points	Drabble Points
4-3-3-3 = 8	7	0	0
4-4-3-2 = 10	8	1	1
4-4-4-1 = 11	8	2	2
5-3-3-2 = 11	8	1	1
5-4-2-2 = 12	9	2	2
5-4-3-1 = 13	9	2	3
6-3-2-2 = 13	9	2	3
5-4-4-0 = 14	9	3	4
6-3-3-1 = 14	9	2	3
7-2- 2-2 = 14	9	2	2
5-5-2-1 = 14	10	3	3
5-5-3-0 = 15	10	3	4
6-4-2-1 = 15	10	3	3
6-4-3-0 = 16	10	3	4
7-3-2-1 = 16	10	3	3
7-3-3-0 = 17	10	3	4
8-2-2-1 = 17	10	3	3
6-5-1-1 = 16	11	4	3
6-5-2-0 = 17	11	4	4
7-4-1-1 = 17	11	4	3
7-4-2-0 = 18	11	4	4
8-3-1-1 = 18	11	4	3
8-3-2-0 = 19	11	4	4
9-2-1-1 = 19	11	4	3
9-2-2-0 = 20	11	5	4
10-1-1-1 = 20	11	6	3
6-6-1-0 = 18	12	5	5
7-5-1-0 = 19	12	5	5
8-4-1-0 = 20	12	5	5
9-3-1-0 = 21	12	5	5
10-2-1-0 = 22	12	5	5
11-1-1-0 = 23	12	7	5
7-6-0-0 = 20	13	6	5
8-5-0-0 = 21	13	6	5
9-4-0-0 = 22	13	6	5
10-3-0-0 = 23	13	6	5
11-2-0-0 = 24	13	7	5
12-1-0-0 = 25	13	8	5
13-0-0-0 = 26	13	9	5

The table is ordered by the amount of Zar Points assigned, in ascending order. As might be expected, ALL methods basically follow the same ascending line, giving the least amount of points for the balanced distributions and the biggest amount of points for the "wildest" distributions. Since for everyone the **4-3-3-3 case** is the "**base**" to which everybody assigns the minimum points we are going to consider only the rest of the groups in the evaluation methods (taking 4333 distribution as base).

In the table below, the columns of the table are the displacements from the "base", (e.g. +1 means the first group after the base of 4-3-3-3) while the actual number in the body of the table represent **the number of distributions** the corresponding group.

Method	**+1**	**+2**	**+3**	**+4**	**+5**	**+6**	**+7**	**+8**	**+9**	**+10**	**+11**	**+12**	**+13**	**+14**	**+15**	**+16**	**+17**
Zar Points	1	2	1	2	4	2	3	4	3	3	4	2	2	2	1	1	1
Marty Bergen	3	6	7	9	6	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Goren 3-2-1	2	7	8	5	6	6	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Drabble	2	3	12	8	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Marty Bergen's Points classifies the hands **in 6 groups**, the 3-2-1 **in 9**, Drabble **in 5**, and Zar Points **in 17.** This means by the criteria of **span of base** (number of classification groups) Zar points are between 2 to 3.4 times better than the rest of the methods.

The **separation power** of the methods is given by the max number of distributions in a group. In Zar Points this number is 4, while Bergen has 9, Goren – 8, and Drabble – 13. Again - between 2 and 3.2 times better results.

When we take into account the number of elements (hands) in each group, we can now find the **Standard Deviation** for each method and see the difference there. Here is what is meant by that.

The root-mean-square (RMS) of a variant x, sometimes called the quadratic mean, is the square root of the mean squared value of x:

$$\begin{cases} \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} x_i^2}{n}} & \text{for a discrete distribution} \\ \sqrt{\frac{\int P(x)x^2\,dx}{\int P(x)\,dx}} & \text{for a continuous distribution.} \end{cases}$$

(http://mathworld.wolfram.com/Root-Mean-Square.html).

Scientists often use the term **root-mean-square** as a synonym for standard deviation when they refer to the square root of the mean squared deviation of a signal from a given baseline or fit.

Applying the standard deviation from the basis (the x coordinate) measure to the three hand-evaluation methods (using the number of hands in each group) yields the following:

Recursive Zar Points:	root-square (91/17)	=	rs(5.35)= 2.31
Marty Bergen Points	root-square (260/ 6)	=	rs(43.33)= 6.58
Goren 3-2-1 for void-x-xx	root-square (220/ 9)	=	rs(24.44)= 4.94
Drabble's method	root-square(390/ 5)	=	rs(78.00)= 8.87

So by this 3rd criteria, the **standard deviation** of the evaluation method, Zar Points demonstrate between 2.2 and 3.6 times better results.

The interesting part is that by **ANY** of the applied three criteria:

1) Span of base

2) Separation power

3) Standard Deviation

Zar Points manifests roughly **three times better results** than **any of the three competitors**.

9) The Conversion

The Conversion?

Why would you care to convert Zar Points to Goren Points or Bergen Points when we JUST showed in three different ways that Zar Points are three times better that any other method?

"Why should I convert something 'good' to something 'bad'?" – I hear you already asking … "I'd simply use the 'bad' directly rather than calculating the 'good' first and then scaling it down to the 'bad'."

First, every method has its own 'base' of people who use it for one or another reason – **familiarity, convenience** and **habit** are some of the reasons that jump right-off your mind. Some people find it easier to calculate 3*v + 2*s + d (where v is the number of voids, s is the number of singletons, and d is the number of doubletons in the hand) than calculating (a+b) + (a-d) or calculating 2*a + (b-d) for example.

Why could that be – ask them :-)

Second, when offered a new method that uses new ranges and spans over new numbers of evaluation metrics, you tend to **"subconsciously" try to convert** or "squeeze" this new range into the range you are comfortable with. Such a conversion would enable you to 'operate' in a familiar context and get better answers without leaving the comfort of the familiar 'dimensions'.

We already mentioned such a 'convenient conversion' when discussing that the experts use the 4 ½ - 3 – 1 ½ - ½ HCP scheme instead of the regular Milton Works HCP point-count of 4-3-2-1 to make the 'good' 6-4-2-1 solution look like the 'bad' 4-3-2-1 HCP solution in terms of 'dimensions' and ranges (this was in the **Which HCP count is "mathematically correct"** section of the this article).

So, how would that translate in terms of Zar Points?

On the HCP side it naturally translates to the above-mentioned HCP valuation of 4 ½ - 3 – 1 ½ - ½ that the experts use in their hand evaluation methods.

On the DP side, let's consider the two most common 'conversions' - to Goren Points and to Bergen Points.

Having a look at the comparison tables in the previous section, you realize that to 'convert' Zar Points to **Goren** Points you have to:

1) **Subtract 8** from the calculated Zar Points count – this "equalizes" or "aligns" the lower ends of the scales while also aligns it with 0, thus preparing it for the second scaling which follows below.

2) **Divide** the result **by 2** - this "aligns" the higher end of the scale (scale it back to 9).

Thus for the 5521 distribution you get 3 Goren Points – just as many as for the 7330 distribution. In Zar Points you get 14 for the 5521 and 17 for the 7330. To 'see' the 14 points in "Goren Terms" we do (14 – 8) / 2 = 3. This means that in "Goren Terms" the 5521 valuation are **the same** in Zar Points and Goren Points..

For the 7330 we "scale down" the 17 Zar Points by (17 - 8) / 2 = 4 ½. This is a **significant difference – 4 ½ vs. 3** for the same hand.

Now, let's turn to the **Bergen** Points – again have a look at the comparison table. Here we have to:

1) **Subtract 8** to align it with 0 in order to prepare the appropriate division (conversion of the higher end);

2) **Divide** the result **by 2** – this aligns the higher end of the scale;

3) **Add 7** to re-align the lower ends (that brings the lower end to 7 and the higher end to 13)

Thus for the 5521 distribution you get 10 Bergen Points – just as many as for the 7330 distribution. In Zar Points you get 14 for the 5521 and 17 for the 7330. To 'see' the 14 points in "Bergen Terms" we do [(14 – 8) / 2] + 7 = 10. This means that in "Bergen Terms" the 5521 valuation are **the same** in Zar Points and Bergen Points..

For the 7330 we "scale down" the 17 Zar Points by [(17 - 8) / 2] + 7 = 11½ . This is a **significant difference – 11 ½ vs. 10** for the same hand.

Just one more example - the 6511 and 8320 distributions to both of which Goren assigns 4 points and Bergen 11 points, but Zar Points vary from 16 to 19. Convert and see the corresponding results.

You can do this 'conversion' for any other distribution of course, and see the distinction in you familiar setting – be it Goren or Bergen.

To finish this section, let's examine a couple of hands and evaluate them at the point of picking up your cards. We'll evaluate them in Goren Points, Bergen Points, Zar Points, Zar Points "converted" to Goren, and Zar Points "converted" to Bergen.

The first hand has a 5521 distribution and relatively low amount of controls, the second one has a 7330 distribution and relatively high amount of controls. Both hands with the same HCP count of 15:

Hand A	**Hand B**
♠ K Q 8 3 2 ♥ K Q J 9 2 ♦ A 4 ♣ 7	♠ A K 10 8 7 5 4 ♥ A 10 9 ♦ A 9 6 ♣ __

Both hands are decent hands with playing strength, yet looking somewhat different …

1) Goren Points Count

Both hands in Goren Points are worth **18 points** - 15 + 2 + 1 for Hand A and 15 + 3 for Hand B.

2) Bergen Points Count

Both hands in Bergen Points are worth **25 points** - 15 + 5 + 5 for Hand A and 15 + 7 + 3 for Hand B.

3) Zar Points Count

Hand A in Zar HCP Points is worth 15 + 4 = 19 (4 pts for the 4 controls). For the 5521 we get 10 + 4 = 14 Zar Points for a total of 33 Zar Points. We add 1 point for HCP concentrated in 3 suits = **34 pt.**

Hand B in Zar HCP Points is worth 15 + 7 = 22 (7 pts for the 7 controls). For the 7330 we get 10 + 7 = 17 Zar Points for a total of 39 Zar Points. We add 1 point for HCP concentrated in 3 suits = **40 pt.**

A **difference of 6** Zar Points between the 2 hands. Note that this is **one level** difference!

4) Zar Points "converted" to Goren

Hand A in "Converted" Zar HCP Points is worth 4 ½ + 6 + 3 + 1/2 = 14 (1 pt less than the 15 if using the standard Milton Works 4-3-2-1 HCP count).

Hand B in "Converted" Zar HCP Points is worth 3 x 4 ½ + 3 = 16 ½ (1 ½ pts more than the 15 if using the standard Milton Works 4-3-2-1 HCP count).

Hand A in "Goren-Converted" Zar Points is worth (as calculated in the beginning of the section) 3 points – the same amount as in the actual Goren Points.

Hand B in "Goren-Converted" Zar Points is worth (as calculated in the beginning of the section) 4 ½ points – 1 ½ pts more than the actual Goren Points.

So, Hand A is worth 14 + 3 = 17 "Goren-converted" Zar Points – **that's 1 point less** than the Goren valuation itself (17 vs. 18).

Hand B is worth 16 ½ + 4 ½ = 21 "Goren-converted" Zar Points – **that's 3 points more** than the Goren valuation itself (21 vs. 18).

In other words, with the Hand A Zar Points are 17/18 = **94% more conservative** than Goren (in "Goren Terms") while with the Hand B Zar Points are 21/18 = **117 % more aggressive** than Goren (in "Goren Terms" again).

5) Zar Points "converted" to Bergen

Hand A in "Converted" Zar HCP Points is worth 4 ½ + 6 + 3 + 1/2 = 14 (1 pt less than the 15 if using the standard Milton Works 4-3-2-1 HCP count).

Hand B in "Converted" Zar HCP Points is worth 3 x 4 ½ + 3 = 16 ½ (1 ½ pts more than the 15 if using the standard Milton Works 4-3-2-1 HCP count).

Hand A in "Bergen-Converted" Zar Points is worth (as calculated in the beginning of the section) 10 points – the same amount as in the actual Bergen Points.

Hand B in "Bergen-Converted" Zar Points is worth (as calculated in the beginning of the section) 11 ½ points – 1 ½ pts more than the actual Bergen Points.

So, Hand A is worth 14 + 10 = 24 "Bergen-converted" Zar Points – **that's 1 point less** than the Bergen valuation itself (24 vs. 25).

Hand B is worth 16 ½ + 11 ½ = 28 "Bergen-converted" Zar Points – **that's 3 points more** than the Bergen valuation itself (28 vs. 25).

In other words, with the Hand A Zar Points are 24/25 = **96% more conservative** than Bergen (in "Bergen Terms") while with the Hand B Zar Points are 28/25 = **112 % more aggressive** than Bergen (in "Bergen Terms" again).

I hope this gives you a good perspective.

10) The Summary

Zar Points enable you to essentially do two things:

- Stop at **part-score with 24-HCP** when no game is in sight but the crowd bids a game "from general considerations";
- Bid **17-HCP games** or slams when the crowd has an "all-pass" board, from the same "general considerations".

Here is how:

Opener:

1) Add your **HCP** and your **Controls** in the hand;
2) Add the **sum** of the two longest suits to the **difference** between the **longest** and **shortest;**
3) If you can count to **26** or more – you can comfortably open the bidding;

Responder:

4) Make the opening-hand calculation mentioned above;
5) Add +1 pt for every **honor** in the partner suit (up to +2) and +3 pt for **extra length**;
6) If you can count to **16**, comfortably raise to level 2; if you count to **26** – it's a game.

Zar Points demonstrate unsurpassed precision in evaluation of the distribution power of a hand – about 3 times better that any other method in the wonderful game of bridge.

I have heard people sometimes complaining that Zar Points are a bit too-complex. But the term "complex" is a relative thing. What do you expect to beat these experts out there with – with bare hands? They'll call the police :-)

If you only see their systems written down, you'd be stunned to see 100, 200, 300 pages! No joke – I have copies of systems with these exact "mileages". And these are systems of world champions, who know that "nothing for nothing" is not a good deal… You have to make an effort – complex or otherwise.

By the time you sit around the bridge table, it's already too complex :-)

So, are Zar Points too complex for you? Think again – and good luck at the table:

Zar Petkov,
October 2003, Toronto, Canada

Questions, suggestions, critique? Please, contact me at: **ZarPetkov@Compuserve.COM**

Part Two

The Finer Arts

The Finer arts of Zar Points

Calculating the Zar Points in a hand is straightforward, as you already know:

(HCP + Controls)

+

(a + b) + (a – d)

where **a, b, c,** and **d** are the lengths in descending order of the 4 suits of the hand (ranging from 13 to 0).

To open, you need 26 points. To go to a game – double the opening amount, or 52. You simply count and bid.

NOTE, that you can do just fine without **this** second part of the article, which gets into somewhat deeper stuff.

Pace yourself comfortably.

How does this fit in the bidding space, though? And what is the bidding space to begin with? How does the fit and misfit affect the bidding and what is a fit to begin with? How often do you have a fit? What are the bid-pips and the foot-prints? What is The Theorem and how you can use it?

Questions like these will be answered in the discussion below.

1) The Bid-pips

Let's now have a look at the entire board and see what the global evaluations would be. Now we will consider the suits in the combined hands and the evaluation formula will be based on the shapes of both hands.

The considerations below have been inspired by a board given to me by Mike Lawrence as a challenge for an initial version of the article - thank you, Mike. Here are the 2 hands of the board:

♠ K J x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x ♣ K x x	♠ x ♥ K J x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x x

The best contract is 2♦ and the question is "Can you stop there?" I will allow myself, instead of this board to consider 2 "almost identical boards" – this will make it easier for me to unveil the point. Here they come:

1)

♠ A x x x ♥ K x x ♦ K J x x x ♣ x	♠ K x x x ♥ A x x ♦ x ♣ K J x x x

2)

♠ x ♥ K J x x x ♦ K x x ♣ A x x x	♠ K J x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x ♣ K x x x

These hands in the 2 boards are "almost completely" identical. They have:

- the same shape;
- the same HCP;
- the same Controls;
- the same top honors;
- the same Zar Points;
- the same offensive power;
- the same suit-support;
- the same level of best contract (level 2).

Still … which of these 2 boards do you like better? I'll make it a bit harder – FORGET that with the first board the best contract is 2♠ and you will score 110 while in the second one it's 2♣ and you'll score "only" 90. Let's pretend for a moment that each of the four suits brings 30 pt, i.e. both boards would bring you 110. NOW which one do you like better? If any – after all they are "almost completely" identical…

I personally STILL like the first one better. FOUR TIMES better! Why? And why four times?

Because it gives me FOUR TIMES bigger **bidding space** than the second one!

Do you see that? Four times is a lot!

Let's introduce the term **bid-pips** (pips is a term we use in backgammon to describe the steps in the backgammon space). A bid-pip is any bid in the bidding space, so there are 5 bid-pips per level, and 35 bid-pips in the entire bidding space (as opposed to only 24 pips in backgammon – that's why backgammon is a simpler game :-) - and why I love it so much). So, there are 2 bid-pips between the bids 1♦ and 1♠, 4 bid-pips between 1♥ and 2♦ etc.

Now you probably see why board 1) has 4 TIMES bigger bidding space than board 2)… In board 1) East opening bid is 1♣ and there are 8 bid-pips to the 'best contract' of 2♠, while in board 2) East opens 1♠ and there are only 2 bid-pips to the best contract of 2♣! Don't tell me that you'll stop at the best contract of 2♣ here – I'll call the Director :-)

Things like bid-pips, bid-space, and what I call the inherent **HCP-inertia** (the fact that it is almost impossible to stop at a contract like 2♣ if you have 25 HCP in the combined hands simply because you need room to express the "additional" and "undisclosed" power of the hands) are all things that you HAVE to keep in mind during the bidding process and in the same time things that can be grasped neither by Zar Points, nor by "Czar" points if they exist :-) As Kozma Prutkov said nearly a century ago, "Nobody can grasp the ungraspable" – that's where the beauty of the game of bridge comes from. Bidding sequences like 1♠ - 2♥ have to catch your attention and to alert you that you have already "eaten-up" 8 bid-pips without communicating that much of information, and to consequently make you more conservative for this board. Let alone the opponents' interventions and even worse – their pre-emptive bidding. It's a jungle out there :-)

To make things more clear, let's consider the following scenario. NOTE how important this hypothetical scenario is in order to recognize that the bidding space is HUGE, contrary to your beliefs, probably.

So … we are going to consider a "slightly" different game of bridge – a game in which ALL the 4 people are "partners" in the sense that they cooperate towards a common goal – the goal to REVEA L the holdings of EVERY player, ALL the 13 cards of ALL the 4 players. And you can go as high as possible – like bid 9 NT, 13 SP, 21 CL etc. as needed. BUT – at the end you can write down the positions of ALL 52 cards at the table. Interesting …

Remember that the number of all possible deals is pretty large –

53, 644, 737, 765, 488, 792, 839, 237, 440, 000

last time I counted.

This hypothetical question has been answered by an old friend and former partner of mine – Manol Iliev. And the answer is pretty surprising. It turns out (mathematically proved, of course) that everything will be clear by the level of 6 Clubs! That's all!

At level 6 you'd know EVERY card of the 52 cards on the table!

How big is the bidding space indeed, or how many different bidding sequences are possible in the regular game of bridge? The answer will surprise you more than the answer about the number of all possible deals – it is

2, 400, 000, 000, 000, 000, 000 TIMES bigger

than the above-mentioned number of deals !!!

The total number of bidding sequences including doubles, redoubles, and passes is a bit more than

128 E+45, that is - 128 times 10 to the power of 45

Not enough room to fit-in the actual number :-)

So … there is room at the table – you just have to use it wisely.

2) The Misfit

Let's now get back to our original board where 2♦ is the best contract:

♠ K J x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x ♣ K x x	♠ x ♥ K J x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x x

The main concern here is the one of the so-called "mis-fit". And the worst thing about the term "mis-fit" is that it is "mis-leading". Here is why.

Is this a misfit?

♠ K J x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x ♣ K x x	♠ x ♥ K J x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x x

Is this a misfit?

♠ A x x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x ♣ K x x	♠ x ♥ A x x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x x

Is this a misfit?

♠ A x x x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x ♣ K x	♠ x ♥ A x x x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x

Hey, I'll make a slam in the last board if EITHER of the major suits breaks 3-3! (and some minor additional luck :-)

And EACH of these 3 boards has the SAME HCP power and "semi-similar" shape!

What is a fit, what is a misfit, and what are our chances to get one of these?

The answer is in

3) Zar's Theorem – "In bridge, you always have a fit"

Sounds a bit ambitious, so … let's get right down to the proof.

Applying the **Dirichlet's Principle** from mathematics, we see that THE WORST-CASE scenario when talking about fit and misfit is that you either have at least two 7-card fits (the so called "Italian" fits) or one 8+ card fit.

We have 13 + 13 = 26 Dirichlet's Balls (the cards in both hands) and 4 Dirichlet's Drawers (the suits). You can easily see that (13 + 13) – 4 x 6 = 2 (the 6 comes from filling-in all 4 "boxes" to 6 each) and these 2 "loose" cards will have to fall in the one or two of the Dirichlet's Principle Drawers (suits in our case), making the "fit" of at least 6+1 = 7.

This means that you virtually **always have a fit or fits somewhere.**

The best-case scenario is of course a board with two 13-card fits:

♠ A Q x x x x ♥ K J x x x x x ♦ ___ ♣ ___	♠ K J x x x x x ♥ A Q x x x x ♦ ___ ♣ ___

Do you like this board? I don't – it would be a wash on any tournament …Almost everybody will bid a GRAND. Unless someone decides to fish for a top and bids 7 NT, hoping for a favorable lead :-)

The Theorem has **deep implications** on the bidding process simply because you **do know** that your goal is to find the **pre-existing** fit(s) rather than approaching the bidding trying to **find out whether or not** you have fits. Think about it!

The best example is the **balancing**. You have noticed that part of the "aggressiveness" of the experts is that these guys will almost never let you play at low levels, provided that you **wish** to stop there. They will try to push you up or to get the contract in "their" suit.

Do they know they "have" a suit? At least they "hope", that's for sure :-) The Theorem gives you the confidence to shoot for finding your best spot, simply because you know that it exists.

If you get a little greedy and ask the question "How often do I get into the worst-case scenario of 2 7-card fits", I have good news for you. For that to happen, you have to have **special cases** of **only four possible combinations:** 4333 vs. 4333, 4333 vs. 4432, 5332 vs. 4432, and 5332 vs. 5332 distributions. Which special cases? The following ones: 4333 vs. 3433, 4333 vs. 2344, 4432 vs. 3244, 5332 vs. 2335, and 5332 vs. 2434 (and slight variations of these - the unbalanced combinations like 6160 vs. 1606, 7060 vs. 0706 etc. have a negligible probability ~0%).

So when you run the probabilities, you reach the following form of The Theorem:

In bridge you always have a fit:

– about **85% of the time at least one 8-card fit**

– about **15% of the time at least two 7-card fits**

If you are a careful reader, you probably have noticed that there is a chance for you to have 3 7-card fits (the 4432 vs. 3343 case). This chance is included in the 15% chance for having only 7-card fits. These results were also re-checked with several generations of deals via DealMaker, DealPump, and Deals programs (chunks of 1,000,000 boards each time).

One last word on this subject, stemming from the fact that if you have only 7-card fits (neglecting the cases with ~0% probability like 7060 vs. 0706), **both hands are balanced.** In this case the only thing that matters is **brute HCP power**. If you have it - generally play in NT. If they have it - let them suffer, because if you show your head 'above the water', they'll make a salad out of you.

Think twice before balancing with 4333 **despite The Theorem**. Better yet – think twice and then pass :-)

The only exception to that rule would be when in Matchpoints you have to push your opponents out of a non-vulnerable 1 NT - arguably the point in which you have to be most aggressive. But think once before doing it :-)

Let's now get back to the other bridge theory addressing the issue of levels of play – The Law, and how it can be extended in made more explicit. This is the subject of the following "Superfits Theorem".

4) The Superfits Theorem

Is there any relationship between The Theorem and The Law of total tricks?

As mentioned above, for a comprehensive study of The Law and how it influences your bidding-decision-making process, your best source is the set of Larry Cohen's books on the subject. He also has his own website which you can visit at your convenience.

To see the correlation between The Theorem and The Law, let us apply the **same Dirichlet's Principle** from mathematics (as we did in the proof of The Theorem) to the case when the opponents have one superfit (defined as a 10-11 cards-suit) first, and than to the case when the opponents have a double superfit (at least 20 cards in 2 suits).

In the first case, when the opponents have a single superfit, this leaves you side with 24 cards in 3 suits which means that according to Dirichlet your side has at least **three 8-cards fits** instead of the guaranteed minimum of 2 7-card suits (in the worst-case scenario).

In the second case of double superfit on the opponents side, you will be left with max 6 cards in these 2 suits and 20 cards in the other 2 suits – again applying the Dirichlet Principle you would be guaranteed at least **two 10-cards fits** yourself in the worst-case scenario!

To summarize:

1) If the opponents have a **single superfit,** The Theorem guarantees you that your side has (in the worst-case scenario) a **triple 8-cards fits**.

2) If the opponents have a **double superfit**, The Theorem guarantees you that your side (in the worst-case scenario) also has a **double superfit.**

Easy-to-remember guidelines, I believe.

To make it even simpler, the finding can be summarized by the principle "**The more they have, the more we have**" :-) And vice-versa, of course – the moment you realize you have a double-superfit you know that the opponents also have a double-superfit, whether they know it or not. This may result in a tactical decision to either:

1) hide your second fit while still account for it, or

2) make a psychic bid in one of the opponents' suits, knowing that partner is "not rich in that suit" anyway and chances that you are going to mislead him are slimmer.

Is the second option perfectly legal and the correct thing to do? I don't want to open this kind of discussions, but the short answer is "oh, yeah …". As long as your partner gets the same information (**or mis-information** for that matter) and acts accordingly, you are fine and dandy. The fact that you **know** that chances are 95% that you will mislead the opponents and only 5% that you will mislead your partner only speaks about your smarts, and if you don't approve of that statement you probably disapprove the bodycheck in hokey and the fact that in boxing the guys hit each other in the face and the referee pretends he doesn't notice :-)

Can we push this simple superfits discovery a bit further, though …

Let's try – it may be worth the effort.

Let's assume that the opponents have a double-fit in 2 of the suits and the **total amount** of cards in both of these suits **is N**.

Watch what kind of simple calculations we are going to do now.

The total amount of cards in these 2 suits (we'll call them **"their"** suits) is **26**.

This leaves us with the amount of **(26-N)** cards in their suits.

But we have 26 cards in our combined hands between me and my partner, so for the other 2 suits (I'll call them **"our"** suits) we are left with

$$26 - (26 - N) = 26 - 26 + N = \textbf{N cards in our suits.}$$

This leads us to **The Superfits Theorem:**

IF: Opponents have N cards in 2 suits

THEN: We have the SAME amount of N cards in THE OTHER 2 suits.

If they have 16 cards in the minor suits, we have 16 cards in the major suits.

If they have 16 cards in the major suits, we have 16 cards in the minor suits.

I am sure you see already where you can utilize The Superfits Theorem. Yes – after Michaels cue-bids and after unusual 2 NT. Such bids should not panic you, but rather sharpen your senses and watch for the other two suit, because most probably they are the ones you can find a fit in.

The easiest way to remember The Superfit Theorem is by **"Whatever they have, we have".**

I am sure you have already noticed the appearance of **this magic number** of **26** again …

Do you remember it from somewhere?

Correct – it's **the opening amount** of Zar Points that you need.

Now that we know we virtually always have a fit somewhere, and that "Whatever they have, we have", let's get back to the question of misfit.

5) The Footprints

In Zar Points we don't deal with misfits – we deal with **"footprints"** and controls. The "footprint" of a suit is the shorter side of the suit in both hands:

K x x x x	x x	has a footprint of 2
A x x x	x	has a footprint of 1
A x x x	x x x	has a footprint of 3

You see now how easy it becomes to evaluate the immediate losers using footprints (FP) and controls (CT):

If FP < CT,	you have	0 immediate losers.
If FP = CT,	you have	min(1, FP) losers (1 in most cases; 0 with void against xx(xxx)).
If FP > CT,	you have	min(2, FP) losers (2 in most cases; 1 with x against xx(xxx)).

I already hear you screaming "That's too complex, man … That's for a computer…" I am not going to get deeper in the manipulation of the footprints and controls, immediate losers, and their cooperation with the suits where your fit(s) are – it goes beyond the scope of the article, but you get the picture, I hope. Here is a simple example which illustrates the point.

The **same fits** "13 – 7 – 6 – 0", with **same 10 HCP** but with **different footprints**:

1)

♠ A Q x x x x ♥ x x x x x x x ♦ ___ ♣ ___	♠ K J x x x x x ♥ ___ ♦ x x x x x x ♣ ___

This board has 0 losers in any of the 4 suits. The contract - 7♠ (the defenders wouldn't find the killing trump lead :-).

The footprints of all the 3 non-trump suits are 0. Now, the second example:

2)

♠ A Q x x x x ♥ x x x x ♦ x x x ♣ ___	♠ K J x x x x x ♥ x x x ♦ x x x ♣ ___

This board has 3 losers in both ♥ and ♦ suits, since the footprints are 3 and controls are 0. The contract - 1♠. A significant difference by any standard, I would say :-).

6) Standard Bidding Systems with Zar Points

As you certainly know by now, Zar Points is a hand-evaluation system rather than bidding system by its own. You can continue using your own conventions and systems, while still constantly evaluating and re-evaluating your hand as the bidding progresses and act accordingly.

Having said that, there are systems and … then there are systems :-) Which ones are suitable for direct Zar Points involvement and which ones are not? Which bidding principles fit the concepts of Zar Points and which don't? This is an important question, which I would like to shed some light on at the end of these discussions.

To answer this question let's state the most important basis on "revealing" the Zar Points in the two hands – the basis is in the suits and fits in both hands, which means that the bidding itself is concentrated around showing the primary and secondary suits of the hands.

Talking about "Standard Systems", the first than comes to mind is **"Standard American"** - no surprises here :-) Is Standard American (and the popular SAYC – Standard American Yellow Card) suitable? The answer is … regrettably not. And the reason for that is in the weakest part of that system – the fact that 1 NT is NOT forcing after the opening 1♥/1♠ by partner. Having 1NT available as a "pass-through" bid allows the partner to reveal his hand and gives YOU the opportunity to re-count your Zar Points and act accordingly.

SAYC's two over one bid is fine, though, as it is with all the other systems. Even if two over one is NOT a Game Forcing (in case the suit is rebid), the important thing is that it is still a round forcing and allows for a variety of hands to be bid through a two over one bid.

The other 2 major "standard" bidding systems are "Two over One" and the Strong Club systems (no room here for "twisted" systems like "Strong Pass" etc. which have their own merits).

Both "**Two over One**" and "**Strong Club**" (this "bag" includes "Precision Club", "Polish Club", Blue Club" etc.) have the sanity of using 1NT as a forcing bid. And the two-over-one is forcing anyway. That's what makes them suitable for Zar Points valuation in practice.

How about popular conventions like **Jacoby 2NT** and **Bergen raises** over 1♥/1♠ opening?

Both of them fit perfectly. There are several modifications on the Bergen raises part (rather than having the original limits of 7-9 and 10-12 in HCP for the 3♣/3♦ bids) which you may or may not wish to make, but this goes beyond the scope of these discussions anyway.

How does a "standard bidding" system like 2/1 cope with Zar Points, though? The answer to this question is "In a similar, forcing-based way".

This means, that the Zar Points "reserve" that you eventually have, enables you to make a **forcing-bid,** baring the responsibility for ensuring the next Level on your shoulders. So, if you have 31 Zar Points and your partner has bid 2♠ over your opening bid of 1♠, you have the "insurance" of one additional level in your pocket (the 5 additional Zar Points that it) to make an invitation via your secondary suit and enable the partner to re-evaluate his hand accordingly.

You are not supposed to have additional power to make **a bid**, BUT you ARE supposed to have additional power to make **a forcing bid.**

Since you are already familiar with the minimum requirements for Level 4 (52 Zar Points) and Level 6 (62 Zar Points, it will be easy to grasp the entire bidding scale in terms of Zar Points.

The LEVELS

Keeping in mind the Levels will allow Zar Points utilization beyond the initial "prima-vista" Hand Evaluation, enabling you to extend the Zar Points communication throughout the bidding process, as both partner and opponents keep climbing the bidding ladder.

Here are the levels and the linear Zar Points scale that you are partially familiar with already:

Level 7 – Grand Slam - 67 (responder has 41+ Zar Points if the Opener has the minimum of 26)

Level 6 – **Slam** - 62 (responder has 36+ Zar Points if the Opener has the minimum of 26)

Level 5 – Slam Try - 57 (responder has 31+ Zar Points if the Opener has the minimum of 26)

Level 4 – **Game** - 52 (responder has 26+ Zar Points if the Opener has the minimum of 26)

Level 3 – Game Try - 47 (responder has 21+ Zar Points if the Opener has the minimum of 26)

Level 2 – Part Score - 42 (responder has 16+ Zar Points if the Opener has the minimum of 26)

Level 1 – **Opening** - 37 (responder has 11+ Zar Points, as low as it may sound)

Note, that the amount of Zar Points reflects the **combined Zar Points power** of the partnership (at the specific moment of bidding). The names of the Levels are the "de-facto-standard" labels you use to describe the Levels of Contracts in bridge.

Having the Levels cleared, let's summarize the **most important dilemmas** that you actually can encounter and try to resolve with the help of Zar Points. I call them **Critical Decision Points**. Note the interesting part that all of them are at Levels 1, 3, and 5 – the Opening Level, The Game Invitation Level, and the Slam Invitation level.

At the Opening Level:

1) To **open** or pass – this includes postponing your intervention for a later stage;
2) To **respond** or pass – this includes a "trap-pass" and cases like passing you partner's 1NT opening, "inviting" the opponents to "show their heads up".

At the Game Invitation Level:

3) To **invite for a game** or pass – this includes competitive-bidding decisions;
4) To **accept the invitation** or pass.

At the Slam Invitation Level:

5) To **invite for a slam** or pass – this includes competitive-bidding decisions;
6) To **accept the invitation** or pass.

As mentioned above, the main principal in the Zar Points bidding, in respect to applying it to **your current system**, is that every forcing bid by any partner promises 5 more points, thus warranting the safety of the next level of bidding.

Let's consider just one simple sequence, using Zar Points with standard "2 over 1" bidding system. It goes to the Game Try Level, presenting the Responder with a chance to re-evaluate his/her holdings in the light of the secondary suit of the Opener.

Bid - Opener	**Meaning**	**Bid - Responder**	**Meaning**
1♥	26+, 5+ cards in ♥	2♥	16+, 3+ cards in ♥
3♣	4+ cards in ♣, Level 3 guaranteed (I have 31+ and our total is at least 47, so you can bid). Forcing – please re-evaluate your hand based on my secondary ♣ suit.	3♥	No additional upgrade points to my initial 2♥ bid. You can go to game only if you make the Game-total of 52 based on my initial 16 Zar Points.
Pass	OK, I only have 31, so we stop at the part-score level.		

This example just comes to illustrate the way you incorporate the Zar Points "background thinking" in your current bidding attitude, without requiring drastic changes in your everyday bidding practices. For a complete utilization of all the implications that Zar Points introduce, you would need **deeper changes of both system and attitude.**

And fundamentally, as you know already I hope, a Bidding System is not a bunch of conventions "collected" from here and there, but a philosophy shared by the two partners in the partnership. Calculations in bridge are important (especially the ability to count to 13 :-), but common philosophy, along with synchronization and imagination make this game "human" - otherwise Zia wouldn't be able to beat The Computer :-)

Talking about computers, I am also finishing a program playing Zar Points so you would be able to play around with it and see how things work. The program is kept in Java script only so you can run it directly from you browser with no server-side operations (it will come free, of course). You'd be able to run it from your own hard drive, distribute it free to anyone, publish it as an HTML page wherever you like, make modifications, additions, improvements (hey, nobody's perfect :-).

I hope all these discussions gave you a **fresh look** at the wonderful game of bridge!

Enjoy it!

October 2003,
Toronto, Canada.

Part Three

The Research

The Research on Zar Points

Zar Points are based on extensive research on boards in the Game – Slam area.

This includes:

- Over 100,000 boards with **4**♥/♠ contracts;
- Over 70,000 boards with **5**♣/♦ contracts;
- Over 30,000 boards with **6**♣/♦/♥/♠ contracts;
- Over 10,000 boards with **7**♣/♦/♥/♠ contracts;
- Over 20,000 boards with **NT** contracts;

ALL these boards have been **played on Double-Dummy** to ensure **accurate** and **independent** assessment of the playing level of the board.

You can download all the research boards with the detailed Zar Points analysis of **each and everyone** of them from the website.

I have run different sets of boards, between 10,000 and 60,000 portions to ensure that the results provided by the software I've written for the analysis is stable. Below, I discuss the results of the research and these samples of hundreds of thousands of boards and the behavior of Zar Points in these experiments.

1) The Zar Points behavior in the 4♥/♠ contracts

First let's have a look at the facts presented by the computer report.

For the Games in minors I ran 2 sets of boards, all played in double-dummy as usual.

The first set comprised 63,057 boards whose Best Contract indication by the Double-Dummy play was either **4**♥ or 4♠. Here is the very bottom of the report, including the last board (so you get a feel of what's actually reported on each board) and the final statistics. NOTE: **control points** are the Zar Points from **only** Aces and Kings – 6 for A and 4 for K.

```
Board #63057

North:
KT
KJ86
AQ
AQJ92

South:
Q863
T92
T532
T5

BEST contract, actually played on double-dummy, is 4HE,
Controls = 6, ControlPoints = 20
SP_len N = 2, HE_len N = 4, DI_len N = 2, CL_len N = 5
SP_len S = 4, HE_len S = 3, DI_len S = 4, CL_len S = 2

The fit  in this contract is 7-card, N has 4, S has 3
a_N = 5, b_N = 4, c_N = 2, d_N = 2
a_S = 4, b_S = 4, c_S = 3, d_S = 2
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 12
Controls N = 6, HCP N = 20----------------------> N   Zar Points = 38
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 10
Controls S = 0, HCP S = 2-----------------------> S   Zar Points = 12

================================================> NS  Zar  Points = 50
================================================> Zar Points + Fit= 48

Average Zar Points + 3*Fit, 63057 boards at Level 4 is 55.61221
-------------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 50 Zar Points for these 63057 boards is 5443
Hands below 48 Zar Points for these 63057 boards is 1714
-------------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 50 Zar + Fit  Points  for 63057 boards is 2573
Hands below 48 Zar + Fit  Points  for 63057 boards is 662
```

So the average Zar Points with the 3 pt. Fit calculations (rather that the Zar Ruffing Power calculations which are a bit more sophisticated and depend on both your fit and shortness in the side suits) is about **55 Zar Points.** As you remember, the 4-level mark was 52, which is 3 points below the average. This means that the bottom level is **only 5% below the average!** So you have an idea about the precision Zar Points work with.

Let's have a look at the "missed" boards. When you calculate the rough 3-points-per-additional-trump, the missed boards **fell more than 2 times** to only 2,500 out of 63,000+ boards. If you download the 63,057 analyzed boards from the website, you'll see that 90% of the "missed" boards are boards with **double-fit which the program does not calculate**. If you add the calculations for double-fit, **you are in the 99% Game Bidding coverage!**

Let's have a look at the second sample of 4-in-Major Games. It contains **42,756** totally **different** Games:

Board #42756

North:
KQJ53
A973
9
Q42

South:
976
K84
AJ3
AT85

BEST contract is 4SP, Controls = 8, ControlPoints = 26
SP_len N = 5, HE_len N = 4, DI_len N = 1, CL_len N = 3
SP_len S = 3, HE_len S = 3, DI_len S = 3, CL_len S = 4

The fit in this contract is 8-card, N has 5, S has 3
a_N = 5, b_N = 4, c_N = 3, d_N = 1
a_S = 4, b_S = 3, c_S = 3, d_S = 3
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 13
Controls N = 3, HCP N = 12----------> N Zar Points = 28
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 8
Controls S = 5, HCP S = 12----------> S Zar Points = 25

==========> NS Zar Points = 53
==========> Zar Points + Fit= 53

Average Zar Points + 3*Fit(8+), 42756 boards at **Level 4 is 51.992912**

Hands below 50 Zar Points for these 42756 boards is 4296
Hands below 48 Zar Points for these 42756 boards is 1415

Hands below 50 Zar + Fit Points for 42756 boards is 2947
Hands below 48 Zar + Fit Points for 42756 boards is 901

Again the drop of "missed" boards is over 2 times, if counting the fit-points.

Also, the "missed" boards are about **the same 5%!**

When you add the double-fit adjustments (you can see that the majority of the "missed" boards are with double-fit when you download the database), you again end-up in the **99% coverage!**

2) The Zar Points behavior in the 5♣/♦ contracts

First let's have a look at the facts presented by the computer report.

For the Games in minors I ran 2 sets of boards, all played in double-dummy as usual.

The first set comprised 27,776 boards whose Best Contract indication by the Double-Dummy play was either 5♣ or 5♦. Here again is the very bottom of the report, including the last board and the final statistics.

```
Board #27776

North:
Q654
A7
J5
KT632

South:
---
KJT5
K8642
AJ94


BEST contract, actually played on double-dummy, is 5CL,
Controls = 7, ControlPoints = 24
SP_len N = 4, HE_len N = 2, DI_len N = 2, CL_len N = 5
SP_len S = 0, HE_len S = 4, DI_len S = 5, CL_len S = 4

The fit  in this contract is 9-card, N has 5, S has 4
a_N = 5, b_N = 4, c_N = 2, d_N = 2
a_S = 5, b_S = 4, c_S = 4, d_S = 0
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 12
Controls N = 3, HCP N = 10-----------------------> N  Zar Points = 25
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 14
Controls S = 4, HCP S = 12-----------------------> S  Zar  Points = 30

================================================> NS  Zar  Points = 55
================================================> Zar Points + Fit= 57


Average Zar Points + 3* Fit+, 27776 boards at Level 5 is 59.613625
------------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 54 Zar Points for these 27776 boards is 3898
Hands below 52 Zar Points for these 27776 boards is 1422
Hands below 50 Zar Points for these 27776 boards is 397
Hands below 48 Zar Points for these 27776 boards is 93
------------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 54 Zar + Fit  Points  for 27776 boards is 1618
Hands below 52 Zar + Fit  Points  for 27776 boards is 493
Hands below 50 Zar + Fit  Points  for 27776 boards is 100
Hands below 48 Zar + Fit  Points  for 27776 boards is 16
```

So the average Zar Points with the 3 pt. Fit calculations (rather that the Zar Ruffing Power calculations which a bit more sophisticated and depend on both your fit and shortnesses in the side suits) is **59 Zar Points.** As you remember, the 5-level mark was 56, which is 3 points below the average. So the bottom level is **only 5% below the average!** This gives you an idea about the precision interval Zar Points work with.

Let's have a look at the "missed" boards. When you calculate the rough 3-points-per-additional-trump, the missed boards **fell 3 times** to only 1,600 out of 27,776. If you download the 27,776 boards from the website, you'll see that 95% of the "missed" boards are boards with **double-fit which the program does not calculate**. If you add the calculations for double-fit, **you are in the 99% Game Bidding coverage.**

Let's have a look at the second sample of 5-in-Minor Games. It contains **43,014** totally **different** Games:

Board #43014

North:
JT8642
Q
KT843
9

South:
AQ3
832
A9765
J6

BEST contract is 5DI, Controls = 5, ControlPoints = 16
SP_len N = 6, HE_len N = 1, DI_len N = 5, CL_len N = 1
SP_len S = 3, HE_len S = 3, DI_len S = 5, CL_len S = 2

The fit in this contract is 10-card, N has 5, S has 5
a_N = 6, b_N = 5, c_N = 1, d_N = 1
a_S = 5, b_S = 3, c_S = 3, d_S = 2
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 16
Controls N = 1, HCP N = 6----------> N Zar Points = 23
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 11
Controls S = 4, HCP S = 11----------> S Zar Points = 26

==========> NS Zar Points = 49
==========> Zar Points + Fit= 53

Average Zar Points + 3* Fit(8+), 43014 boards at Level 5 is 59.0803

Hands below 54 Zar Points for these 43014 boards is 5331
Hands below 52 Zar Points for these 43014 boards is 1946
Hands below 50 Zar Points for these 43014 boards is 546
Hands below 48 Zar Points for these 43014 boards is 114

Hands below 54 Zar + Fit Points for 43014 boards is 2642
Hands below 52 Zar + Fit Points for 43014 boards is 823
Hands below 50 Zar + Fit Points for 43014 boards is 192
Hands below 48 Zar + Fit Points for 43014 boards is 26

You see how consistent the behavior is – again 59 Zar Points average, again the drop of “missed” boards is over 2 times, if counting the fit-points.

Also, the “missed” boards are about 2,000 out of 40,000, or **the same 5%!**

When you add the double-fit adjustments (you can see that the majority of the “missed” boards are with double-fit when you download the database), you again end-up in the **99% coverage!**

The behavior of Zar Points is surprisingly (or "**not-surprisingly**" :-) consistent!!!

This concludes the presented research on Game Bidding – the next 2 sections deal with Small Slams and Grand Slams bidding.

3) The Zar Points behavior in the 6 ♣/♦/♥/♠ contracts

So, we are in the **slam area** already.

First let's have a look at the facts presented by the computer report.

For the Slam Boards I ran a set of 34,700 boards, all played in double-dummy as usual.

```
Board #34700

North:
AT
AJT6
AK75
QT4

South:
73
85
QJ93
AK632

BEST contract, actually played on double-dummy, is 6DI,
Controls = 10, ControlPoints = 32
SP_len N = 2, HE_len N = 4, DI_len N = 4, CL_len N = 3
SP_len S = 2, HE_len S = 2, DI_len S = 4, CL_len S = 5

The fit  in this contract is 8-card, N has 4, S has 4
a_N = 4, b_N = 4, c_N = 3, d_N = 2
a_S = 5, b_S = 4, c_S = 2, d_S = 2
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 10
Controls N = 7, HCP N = 18-----------------------> N   Zar Points = 35
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 12
Controls S = 3, HCP S = 10-----------------------> S   Zar Points = 25

================================================> NS  Zar  Points = 60
================================================> Zar Points + Fit= 60

Average Zar Points + 3* it(8+ ), 34700 boards at Level 6 is 62.837868
-----------------------------------------------------------------------

Hands below 54 Zar Points for these 34700 boards is 745
Hands below 52 Zar Points for these 34700 boards is 186
-----------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 54 Zar + Fit  Points  for 34700 boards is 303
Hands below 52 Zar + Fit  Points  for 34700 boards is 61
```

So the average Zar Points with the 3 pt. Fit calculations (rather that the Zar Ruffing Power calculations which a bit more sophisticated and depend on both your fit and shortness in the side suits) is **63 Zar Points.** As you remember, the 6-level mark was 62, which is 1 points below the average. This means that the bottom level that Zar Points have is **only 2% below the average!** Even closer than the results in the Game levels.

Let's have a look at the "missed" boards. When you calculate the rough 3-points-per-additional-trump, the missed boards **fell more than 2 times** to only 300 out of 34,700. And again it's the double-fit boards that the program doesn't calculate the fit for. If you add the calculations for double-fit, **you are in the 99% Game Bidding coverage again.**

As I have mentioned several times during the Bermuda Bowl discussions, the small bidding requires careful examination of the location of the controls, if you do not want to get into the "nasty" calculations of footprints. Slam-bidding conventions are there to be used.

4) The Zar Points behavior in the 7 ♣/♦/♥/♠ contracts

So – we arrived in the Grand Slam area.

As usual, first let's have a look at the facts presented by the computer report.

For the Grand Slams I ran a set of 10,344 boards, all played in double-dummy as usual.

```
Board #10344

North:
A2
3
AJ943
AKJ94

South:
KQ86
AT96
K762
7

BEST contract, actually played on double-dummy, is 7DI,
Controls = 11, ControlPoints = 36
SP_len N = 2, HE_len N = 1, DI_len N = 5, CL_len N = 5
SP_len S = 4, HE_len S = 4, DI_len S = 4, CL_len S = 1

The fit  in this contract is 9-card, N has 5, S has 4
a_N = 5, b_N = 5, c_N = 2, d_N = 1
a_S = 4, b_S = 4, c_S = 4, d_S = 1
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 14
Controls N = 7, HCP N = 17-----------------------> N   Zar Points = 38
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 11
Controls S = 4, HCP S = 12-----------------------> S   Zar Points = 27

================================================> NS  Zar  Points = 65
================================================> Zar Points + Fit= 67

Average Zar Points + 3*Fit(8+ ), 10344 boards at Level 7 is 66.64211
-----------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 54 Zar Points for these 10344 boards is 33
Hands below 52 Zar Points for these 10344 boards is 8
-----------------------------------------------------------------------
Hands below 54 Zar + Fit  Points  for 10344 boards is 12
Hands below 52 Zar + Fit  Points  for 10344 boards is 2
```

So the average Zar Points with the 3 pt. Fit calculations (rather that the Zar Ruffing Power calculations which a bit more sophisticated and depend on both your fit and shortnesses in the side suits) is **67 Zar Points.** As you remember, the 7-level mark was 66, which is 1 points below the average. This means that the bottom level that Zar Points have is **only 2% below the average –** a good indication about the precision Zar Points work with.

When you have a look at the "missed" boards again - the "missed" boards are boards with **double-fit which the program does not calculate**. If you add the calculations for double-fit, **you are in the 99% Game Bidding coverage.**

For Grand Slams the precision of getting the controls right is vital – and it is worth considering the rule I introduced during the Bermuda Bowl discussions – you have to be able to mentally play the entire hand before the dummy opens up. That's the accuracy you target in the Slam bidding zone.

So much for the trump contracts.

As you know, Zar Points were developed targeting trump Games and Slams. So it was even more interesting to see how they behave in the NT are.

The next section discusses the results for over 2,000 NT contracts exactly at level 3 – **3NT.**

5) The Zar Points behavior in the 3 NT contracts

First let's have a look at the facts presented by the computer report.

For the 3NT Games I ran a set of **2K**, boards, all played in double-dummy as usual.

```
Board #2077

North:
T94
AK8
Q2
KT964

South:
K8763
J42
KJ3
A2


BEST contract, actually played on double-dummy, is 3NT,
Controls = 8, ControlPoints = 28
SP_len N = 3, HE_len N = 3, DI_len N = 2, CL_len N = 5
SP_len S = 5, HE_len S = 3, DI_len S = 3, CL_len S = 2

a_N = 5, b_N = 3, c_N = 3, d_N = 2
a_S = 5, b_S = 3, c_S = 3, d_S = 2
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 11
Controls N = 4, HCP N = 12-----------------------> N  Zar Points = 27
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 11
Controls S = 4, HCP S = 12-----------------------> S   Zar Points = 27

================================================> NS  Zar  Points = 54
================================================> Zar Points + Fit= 54

Average Zar Points + 3* Fit(8+ ), 2077 boards at Level 3 is 46.720753
--------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

So the average points for level 3 is 47 - as you remember, the 3-level mark was 46, which is 1 point below the average. This means that the bottom level that Zar Points have is **only 2% below the average!** And we are talking 3NT game here.

In case you are wondering why even for 3NT Zar Points give accurate results, remember that:

- there is virtually no Fit-premium here;
- the distributional points are relatively small in these balanced hands;
- the HCP-portion of the Zar Points calculations is heavy.

6) The Goren vs. Zar Comparison in the Game and Slam zone

I have run 60,000 Game Boards in Major and 40,000 Slam Boards in 3 different "modes":

- Goren Points – HCP plus the 3-2-1 points for void, singleton, doubleton (HCP plus 321)
- Zar Basic Points – HCP plus Controls plus (a+b) + a-d)
- Zar Points with general Fit correction - (3 points for extra trump regardless of side-suit holdings).

For Goren points, the 3-2-1 points were added to both the declarer and for the dummy, of course, and I have used 25 points for Game boundary and 32 points for Slam Boundary.

For both types of Zar Points I certainly used the corresponding Game and Slam boundaries for Zar Points that you are familiar with – 52 Zar Points got the Game calculation and 62 Zar Points for Slam calculation.

When it says, for example, "reach 38975 Games, 39K/58K", this means that from the total of 58,000 boards all of which are makeable on double-dummy, the method actually reaches only 38975 of them (certainly, all of them makeable on double-dummy).

That's the settings.

First, let's have a look at the Game-level performance. ALL results presented in K (thousands) are rounded UP for every one of the 3 methods.

The restrictions were measured via HCP only, meaning that neither Basic Zar Points, nor Goren nor Zar Points with general Fit were involved in the selection process. So here you go:

1) Running the boards with less than **27 HCP** count (total of **58K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 25) reach 38975 Games, 39K/58K - 67%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 46787 Games, 47K/58K - 81%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 52795 Games, 53K/58K - 91%

2) Running the boards with less than **26 HCP** count (total of **47K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 25) reach 29339 Games, 30K/47K - 64%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 37277 Games, 38K/47K - 80%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 43285 Games, 44K/47K - 93%

3) Running the boards with less than **25 HCP** count (total of **41K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 25) reach 21606 Games, 22K/41K - 54%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 29822 Games, 30K/41K - 73%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 35819 Games, 36K/41K - 88%

4) Running the boards with less than **24 HCP** count (total of **33K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 25) reach 13361 Games, 14K/33K - 42%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 21864 Games, 22K/33K - 67%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 27789 Games, 28K/33K - 85%

5) Running the boards with less than **23 HCP** count (total of **24K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 25) reach 6506 Games, 7K/24K - 30%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 14569 Games, 15K/24K - 62%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 20225 Games, 21K/24K - 88%

6) Running the boards with less than **22 HCP** count (total of **17K** boards under this restriction):

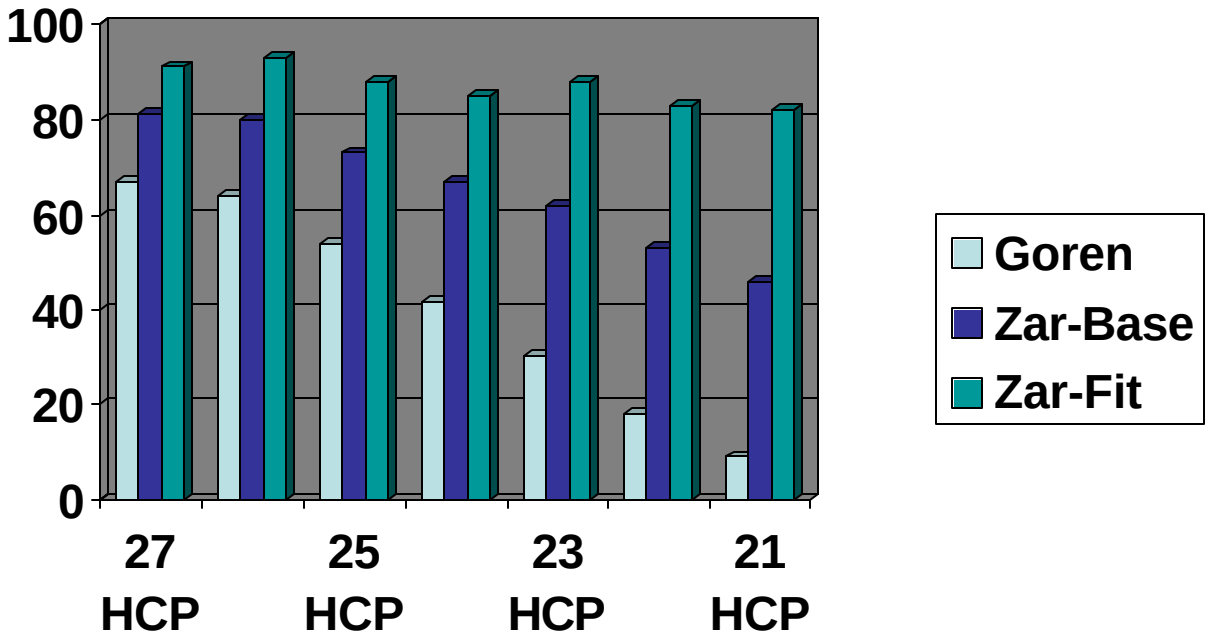
GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 25) reach 2375 Games, 3K/17K - 18%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 8772 Games, 9K/17K - 53%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 13819 Games, 14K/17K - 83%

7) Running the boards with less than **21 HCP** count (total of **11K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321) reach 646 Games, 1K/11K - 9%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 4704 Games, 5K/11K - 46%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 8822 Games, 9K/11K - 82%

Keep in mind that the finer adjustments, including trump-honors, double-fit corrections etc. are NOT calculated.

Here is the graphical representation of this behavior:



So the Ratio of GOREN VS Zar Points with Single Fit adjustments varies roughly from:

67/91 = **74%** of the Games that Zar Points reach in the **25-HCP** Games, to

646/8822 = **7%** for the **21-HCP** Games in 4H/4S.

If we do the average behavior, we have the following numbers for the 3 approaches:

Average achievement for Goren in the Game Bidding zone 21-27 HCP Games: **40%**

Average achievement for basic Zar Points in the Game Bidding zone 21-27 HCP Games: **66%**

Average achievement for Zar Fit Points in the Game Bidding zone 21-27 HCP Games: **88%**

Now let's have a look at the SLAM bidding results, restricted again by HCP.

1) Running the boards with less than **33 HCP** count (total of **32K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 9674 Slams, 10K/32K - 31%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 16094 Slams, 17K/32K - 53%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 22603 Slams, 23K/32K - 72%

2) Running the boards with less than **32 HCP** count (total of **31K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 9130 Slams, 10K/31K - 32%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 15586 Slams, 16K/31K - 52%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 22095 Slams, 23K/31K - 72%

3) Running the boards with less than **31 HCP** count (total of **30K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 7902 Slams, 8K/30K - 26%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 14476 Slams, 15K/30K - 50%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 20981 Slams, 21K/30K - 68%

4) Running the boards with less than **30 HCP** count (total of **29K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 6008 Slams, 7K/29K - 25%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 12739 Slams, 13K/29K - 45%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 19214 Slams, 20K/29K - 69%

5) Running the boards with less than **29 HCP** count (total of **26K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 3647 Slams, 4K/26K - 16%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 10310 Slams, 11K/26K - 43%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 16667 Slams, 17K/26K - 66%

6) Running the boards with less than **28 HCP** count (total of **22K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 1712 Slams, 2K/22K - 9%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 7597 Slams, 8K/22K - 37%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 13620 Slams, 14K/22K - 64%

7) Running the boards with less than **27 HCP** count (total of **17K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 623 Slams, 1K/17K - 6%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 5186 Slams, 6K/17K - 36%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 10662 Slams, 11K/17K - 65%

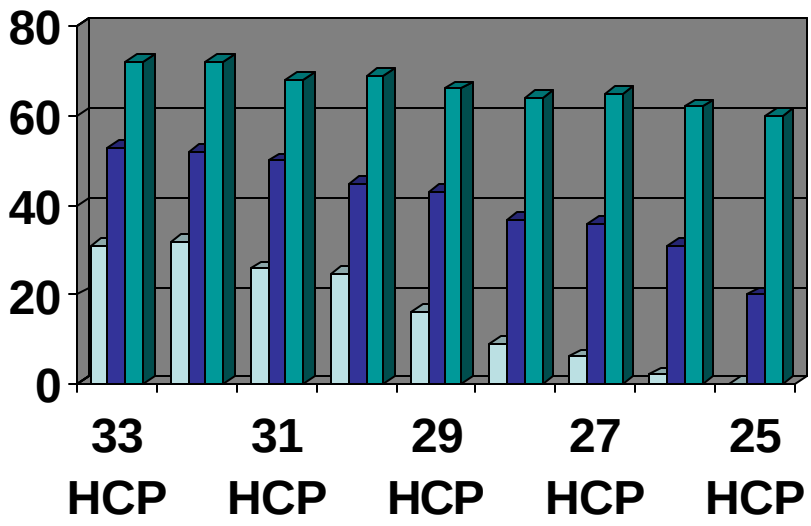
8) Running the boards with less than **26 HCP** count (total of **13K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 147 Slams, .2K/13K - 2%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 3099 Slams, 4K/13K - 31%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 7740 Slams, 8K/13K - 62%

9) Running the boards with less than **25 HCP** count (total of **10K** boards under this restriction):

GOREN Points (HCP + 321 > 32) reach 35 Slams, 0K/10K - 0%
Basic Zar Points (no fit points) reach 1654 Slams, 2K/10K - 20%
Fit Zar Points (+3 extra trump) reach 5359 Slams, 6K/10K - 60%

Here is the graphical representation of these results:



Again you see the consistent behavior of the Zar Points especially in the areas with lighter HCP point count. The same observation you can find in the previous graphics.

These slam-bidding results also do not involve calculations for fit-honors, for double-fit etc. Nevertheless, Zar Points manifest results which are times better than the Goren Points results you are accustomed to.

If we do the average behavior, we have the following numbers for the 3 approaches:

Average achievement for Goren in the Slam Bidding zone 25-33 HCP Games: **17%**

Average achievement for basic Zar Points in the Slam Bidding zone 25-33 HCP Games: **41%**

Average achievement for Zar Fit Points in the Slam Bidding zone 25-33 HCP Games: **67%**

The poor behavior of Goren is a result of virtual inability to bid Slams with the **lower end HCP** like 25, 26, 27 HCP count.

So here is the table conveniently presenting both results:

	Slam Zone	**Game Zone**	**Part Score**
Goren	**17**	**40**	
Zar Points Basic	**41**	**66**	
Zar Points Fit	**67**	**88**	

As you can see, there is an empty column to fill – the part-score zone. This is actually the subject of the next section.

7) The Goren vs. Zar Comparison in the Part-score zone

The previous section compares the behavior of the 3 approaches in the so called "**Type 1** Error Zone", i.e. the errors of the type "underbid" or "misses" of Games and Slams.

This section examines the "**Type 2** Error Zone", i.e. the errors of the type "overbid" in the part-score zone, where instead of staying at level 3 of a Major the corresponding approach goes beyond the makeable contract at Level 3 and consequently goes down.

I have run 70,000 Boards where the best contract is the **3♥/3♠** zone according to the indicated Double-dummy results.

Here is the bottom of the report:

```
Board #70188

The Zar Points for this Board are 43
The GOREN Points for this Board are 18

North:
AQ82
J8754
8
KT6

South:
JT7543
32
J3
Q95

BEST contract, actually played on double-dummy, is 3SP,
Controls = 3, ControlPoints = 10
SP_len N = 4, HE_len N = 5, DI_len N = 1, CL_len N = 3
SP_len S = 6, HE_len S = 2, DI_len S = 2, CL_len S = 3

The fit  in this contract is 10-card, N has 4, S has 6
a_N = 5, b_N = 4, c_N = 3, d_N = 1
a_S = 6, b_S = 3, c_S = 2, d_S = 2
N - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 13

Controls N = 3, HCP N = 10-----------------------> N  Zar Points = 26
S - Zar Points (a+b) + (a-d) = 13
Controls S = 0, HCP S = 4-----------------------> S   Zar Points = 17
N - Zar Level Points  = 26
S - Zar Level Points = 16

================================================> NS  Zar  Points = 43
================================================> Zar Points + Fit= 49
================================================> NS Zar Level  = 42
================================================> NS Fit Level  = 48

GOREN Points ( HCP + "3-2-1" > 25 ) overbid  21931 contracts
Basic Zar Points ( no fit,   > 52 ) overbid   2439 contracts
Fit Zar Points (+3 extr.trmp > 52 ) overbid  10543 contracts
```

So, out of the **70K** boards, Goren went overboard (bidding Game) in **22K** cases, the more aggressive Zar Fit Points were overboard in **11K** cases, and the basic Zar Points went overboard in **3K** cases.

What we are interesting in though, is the complimentary result, which is how many correct contracts they reach, at level 3.

These numbers are 48K for Goren, 67K for basic Zar Points, and 59K for Zar Points with Fit. Not surprisingly, Zar Points with Fit calculations go overboard much more often than the conservative version of Basic Zar Points. Nevertheless, they behave more that 2 times better than Goren Points.

So here are the results:

Average achievement for Goren in the Part Score Zone 21-27 HCP Games: **69%**

Average achievement for basic Zar Points in the Slam Bidding zone 21-27 HCP Games: **96%**

Average achievement for Zar Fit Points in the Slam Bidding zone 21-27 HCP Games: **85%**

Here is our table, now presenting the results of all 3 major Bidding Zones – Part score, Game, and Slam:

	Slam Zone	**Game Zone**	**Part Score**
Goren	**17**	**40**	**69**
Zar Points Basic	**41**	**66**	**96**
Zar Points Fit	**67**	**88**	**85**

Goren - 42 % **Zar Points Basic - 68 %** **Zar Points Fit - 80%**

The bottom line is that if you stick with the **simple** basic Zar Points:

Zar Points = HCP + Controls + (a+b) + (a-d)

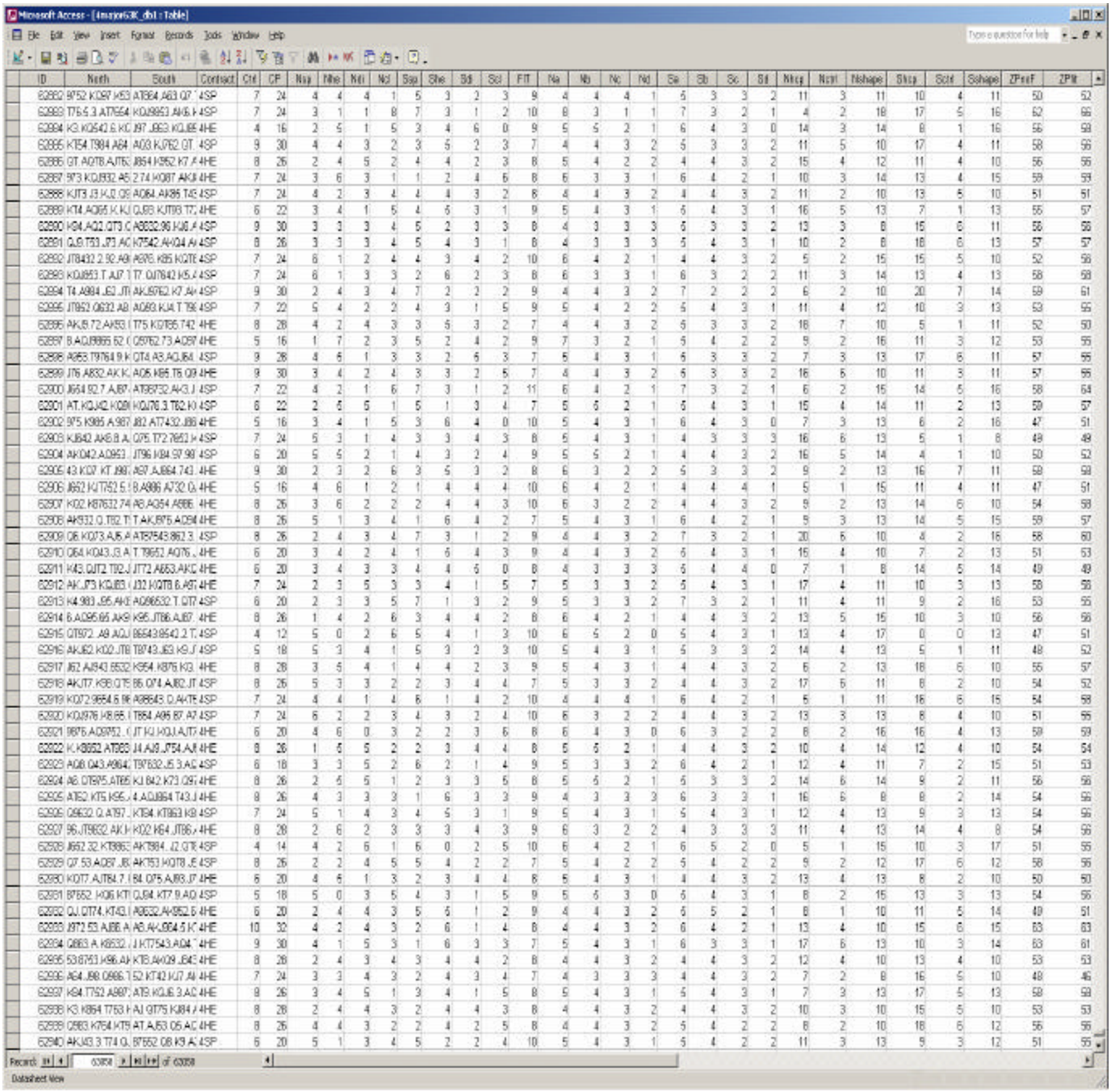
this will still give you a substantial competitive advantage over the "widely-accepted" for the last 50 years bidding methods – roughly **166 % better** bidding performance.

Going to Zar Points with "corrections" basically **DOUBLES** your bidding performance.

9) Concluding Remarks

The research presented here is just a small portion of the research done while coming-up with the Zar Points idea. The database I support is huge and getting bigger on a regular basis – all the World, North-American, European, Olympic etc. events are entered into the database on a regular basis.

Here is a screenshot of the database, just to give you an idea of the flexibility it provides for research both through flexible SQL queries and little ad-hoc Java/JDBC programs that I write on as-needed basis.



This is to say that Zar Points is a project that has not stopped but rather continues with constant research over new data and new ideas coming from the various discussions, experiments, software development, tournaments, commentaries, etc.

If you want to get involved, I can only say – be my guest :-) Any new idea is worth at least considering for awhile – if it is not fruitful by itself, it may trigger side thoughts and push us towards something fruitful that we wouldn't have thought about otherwise, right?

I hope this research would inspire you to keep looking ahead yourself!

Good luck:

ZAR

Part Four

Bermuda Bowl – Zar Points Perspective

Bermuda Bowl - Zar Points Perspective

NOTE:

A lot of people asked me to put a DOWNLOAD link that enables them to save all the Bermuda Bowl comments on this page as a PDF file. HERE it goes:

Click here to DOWNLOAD the entire Bermuda Bowl discussion as a PDF file.

The Bermuda Bowl opens next month in Monte Carlo – **November 2 to November 15, 2003.** As a **"live" exercise** on Zar Points, I'll comment on some of the boards (from the day before), from Zar Points perspective. The exciting part of it is that some of the finalists on Bermuda Bowl are going to actually use Zar Points for the first time in a major tournament while evaluating the prospects for game or slam, which makes the comments even more relevant.

To give you a feel about the format, let's make a preliminary discussion on the "Slam Bidding" issues, based on an event similar in rank to the upcoming event in Monte Carlo. Here are 2 boards from the last **World Championship** in Montreal, Canada last summer, **2002**. Both boards are from the Team Championship and in both boards the actual players "on the spot" are from the well-respected Lavazza Italian Team (multiple champions from all kinds of world events), represented by Lauria-Versace and Bocchi-Duboin.

Board #1. Italy vs. Sweden

♠ K 8 6 ♥ A 7 6 ♦ K J 10 ♣ K J 9 3	♠ A 10 3 2 ♥ J ♦ A 7 2 ♣ A Q 10 5 2	**Bidding:**	**East (Lauria)**	**South**	**West (Versace)**	**North**
			1 ♣	**Pass**	**2 ♣**	**3 ♥**
			4 ♥	**Pass**	**4 ♠**	**Pass**
			4 NT	**Pass**	**5 ♥**	**Pass**
			5 NT	**Pass**	**7 ♣**	**All Pass**

The Italians play the sequence **1 ♣ - 2 ♣** game forcing. You'll catch the ♦ Q and reverse the dummy, but still no prospect for 13 tricks – nowhere to hide the spade loser. So – let's count. East has 13 DP (9+4 for the 5431), 6 controls, and 14 HCP (discounting the singleton J) for a total of 33 Zar Points – a 7 points surplus over the opening, meaning at least 1 level "in his pocket". West has the minimum possible DP for the 4333 – 8 points, 5 controls, and 15 HCP for a total of 28. The upgrade of K J of clubs and the K of spades brings him 3 more points for a total of 31. This brings the Zar Points count limit in both hands to 64 – two levels above the minimum of 52 needed for level 4, that's **level 6**. Move one of the spades in West's hand to clubs, and watch how the count changes – the distribution gets to 5332 or 11 points, bringing 3 additional points, and the 5th club brings another 3 points for the additional trump length (the bid promises 4), ending up with **70 Zar Points** against the 64 before (62 being the bare minimum for a small slam) …

Board #2. Italy vs. Indonesia

♠ 6 ♥ A Q ♦ A 8 7 6 3 ♣ A J 7 6 4	♠ A K J 9 3 ♥ J 9 6 3 ♦ --- ♣ Q 10 9 5	**Bidding:**	**East (Bocchi)**	**South**	**West (Deboin)**	**North**
			1 ♠	**Pass**	**2 ♦**	**Pass**
			2 ♥	**Pass**	**3 ♣**	**Pass**
			3 ♥	**Pass**	**3 NT**	**All Pass**

The ♣ K is on-side and the diamonds are 4-4 so there is no problem for the contract. The bad news is that Manoppo-Lasut in the other room bid and made the 6 ♣ contract, which cannot be defeated by any lead as the cards stay. The question is "Is it reasonable for the pair to go beyond the 3 NT contract?" - so let's count. East has 14 DP (9+5 for the 5440 distribution), 3 controls and 11 HCP for a total of 28 Zar Points – comfortable opening of 1 ♠. You realize that he'd have this **opening with 9 HCP** if you get rid of the two Jacks in the hand. West has 14 DP (10+4 for the 5521), 6 controls, and 15 HCP for a total of 35 Zar Points – this means that against the opening of East, West "on prima vista" has a 9-point surplus (to a game level) before any adjustments for additional information from the bidding. After the **3 ♣** bid (a very strong bid of **new suit on 3rd level** with **no fit** established so far), East has for the first time the opportunity to name a realistic candidate for main fit – clubs – with the 2 additional points collected for the Q and 10 of clubs, making his count up to 30 Zar Points (28 + 2). In other words, the moment a fit is established, West bids the slam directly since he gets points for the additional trump (his bid promises 4 and he has 5), bringing his "surplus" to 10. And as a matter of fact, this is exactly the way the bidding went at the other table – after the **3 ♣** bid, East bids **4 ♣** and West jumps to **6 ♣**.

Both **slam-boards** were bad for the great Italian Team, losing double-digit-amounts of IMPs in each case – in the first they went TOO high, in the second - TOO low … But since they became the new World champions, may be this is the way to go ✍

Bermuda Bowl 2003 – Day 1, November 3

Board #3. Norway vs. Sweden

Let's get right down to business – the first board from the first day is from the Norway – Sweden match. Dealer North, love all. Both tables played 5 ♦, +420, a wash. Here are the bids at the Lindkvist- Fredin (NS for Sweden) vs. Helness -Helgemo (EW for Norway).

♠ Q 8 7 5 ♥ K 5 ♦ A K 8 6 4 ♣ J 3	♠ A 2 ♥ 8 ♦ Q 9 5 3 2 ♣ A Q 10 9 4	**Bidding:**	**East (Helness)**	**South**	**West (Helgemo)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**Pass**
			1 ♦	**1♥**	**1♠**	**1NT**
			2 ♣	**2♥**	**3 ♥**	**Pass**
			4 ♣	**Pass**	**5 ♦**	**All Pass**

The hook in ♣ holds and both tables score 12 tricks for 420. Is the slam good or bad is a different kind of discussion – we have to only see what formally Zar Points "point to" here, right? So:

East has 12+4+10+4 = 30 Zar Points – 4 points "in reserve" to the opening.

West has 13+4+9+3 = 29 initial Zar Points, but after the 5-5 minor two-suiter he adds 3 for the honors in his minors (1 in ♣ and 2 in ♦) plus 2 x 3 = 6 for the super-fit in ♦ for a total of 38 so he holds the slam in his hand (based on the 26 + 38 = 64 points. The only downgrade he can actually make is for ♠Q since it is a 3-rd round player and his partner is known to have maximum 3 cards in both majors.

The ♥K on the other hand is well placed after the re-bid suit by South (if the game comes down to second round of hearts to begin with). NOTE, that the slam holds **despite the duplication** of power like **singleton against K** and **doubleton A against Q.**

NOTE also, that on the way to slam you still use your weapons for slam bidding for establishing the controls in suits, the rule being that the guy who crosses a level on the way to slam **ensures this next level** by her/his excess of Zar Points count.

Board #4. Norway vs. Sweden

Same match, Norway – Sweden match. Dealer West, All VUL. Here are the bids at the Salensminde-Brogeland (NS for Norway) vs. Morath-Gustawsson (EW for Sweden).

♠ A Q 9 ♥ A 3 ♦ K Q J 7 4 ♣ 6 4 2	♠ K 10 5 ♥ K J 10 9 8 6 4 ♦ ___ ♣ K Q 7	**Bidding:**

East (Morath)	South	West (Gustawsson)	North
-	-	1 NT	Pass
2 ♦	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♦	Dbl	Pass	Pass
Rdbl	Pass	4 ♠	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♥	Pass
6 ♥	All Pass		

Despite the **duplication in** ♦ (**void against KQJxx**) the slam boils down to getting the trump Q. If you play the old rule of the late Barry Crane (the Q is before the J in the Majors and after the J in the Minors), you would play the A and shoot towards the J – which is exactly what Gustawsson did and … was surprised …

You certainly have your option open for playing the "8 ever 9 never" rule, keeping in mind the "dbl" in diamonds, though. Down one. BUT – this is not our business here anyway, so let's see what the Zar Points "point to":

West has 16+5+8+3 = 32 Zar Points.

East has 12+3+10+7 = 32 Zar Points.

You get the message (if you can count to 62:-). That's just the **"prima-vista"** evaluation, before the upgrade for trump length and despite the duplication in diamonds which would compensate the trump-length upgrade.

The result of the "prima-vista" evaluation provides the ground for you to push the bidding with forcing bids and further explore the viability of the potential games and slams, while still utilizing your regular arsenal for such Game/Slam tries.

Board #5. Norway vs. Sweden

Same match. Dealer South, All VUL. Here are the bids at the Salensminde-Brogeland (NS for Norway) vs. Morath-Gustawsson (EW for Sweden).

♠ A J 10 9 8 6 5 ♥ A ♦ ___ ♣ K Q 10 7 6	♠ Q 7 3 2 ♥ K J 3 ♦ Q 8 5 ♣ A J 2	**Bidding:** **East (Morath)** **South** **West (Gustawsson)** **North** **-** **3 NT** **5 ♠** **Pass** **7 ♠** **All Pass**

Hm … Do you play Zar Points here :-) 3 NT is gambling, opened on both tables. The question in East's head is obviously "Guess which in the suit of the 3 NT opening. The choices are between ♠ and ♦, and after the bid ♠ from partner (Helgemo bid only 4 ♠ at the other table and his partner passed) you "know" that the suit of the opening is diamonds.

Not much of a play here – the ♠K is doubleton "behind the curve". So "Game, +2" against "GRAND-one-down".

Let's see what we can count here in terms of Zar Points (hey, it's mostly hand evaluation here, with or without Zar Points). Hand evaluation under extreme pressure, needless to say …

We will evaluate the hand of Morath after his partner's bid of 5♠, because he is in an easier position that the partner of Helgemo. You cannot count the ♦Q since your partner most probably has first-round control there to jump directly to level 5 plus everything in diamonds is behind you anyway, so we get 11 HCP + 3 controls for 14 Zar Points, plus 8 for the flat distribution – a total of 22. BUT – **is this** what counts here?

What counts actually are **your upgrades,** rather than these 22 Zar Points, 8 of which are "collected" from your beautiful 4-3-3-3 shape :-) These 22 Zar Points certainly matter when you have to respond to you partner's opening at level one, but not now when your first bid is **forced to be at level 6**!

The upgrades, though, count +1 for the ♠Q and **at least 2x3=6** for the trump length (in fact we have 9 points because of the 11-card fit), for a total of 7 points from the spades alone. Since you have NO information about your partners other suit(s) except that fact that he is certainly short in diamonds, and you have 4 honors to potentially upgrade for additional 4 points, it is reasonable to count 75% of these 4 points as actually useful against your partner's hand, so we end-up **adding 3** points for honor upgrades in the secondary partner's suits. Thus, the total upgrade by **reasonably conservative** estimates brings us 7 + 3 = **10 additional Zar Points** for a **total of 32.**

The need for this probabilistic 75%-rule stems from the fact that you often are "pushed" to make probabilistic decisions in this probabilistic game called bridge – and still have reasonable estimates of the power of the hand.
Note, that you apply the rule also on **probabilistic grounds** – we estimated 2 additional trump lengths while in fact they are 3, for example.

Despite the fact that the amount of Zar Points in the partner's hand is a bit of a mystery, our main question is to decide the next bid only – pass, 6 ♣ cue-bid, or 6♠. Holding 32 Zar Points in support of a spade-contract **excludes** the possibility of passing, so the question is 6♣ or 6♠. And now comes the critical question – what is our partner interested in?

And the answer is – the support in the spades suit. If we had **K x x x** in spades, this would have been as if we had **K Q x x** since the Q would be due to drop – then the bid would have been 6♣, showing the A on the way to slam. With Q only the bid is 6♠ (especially with the "smell" of wild distributions and bad splits looming after the gambling 3NT) so we don't mislead the partner about our potential.

I made it a bit long, but this was an interesting example of how things work under severe pressure and swift squeeze of the bidding space.

Board #6. France vs. Indonesia.

France vs. Indonesia. Dealer South, love all. Here are the bids at the Adat-Aujaleu (EW for France) vs. Sacul-Budirahardia(NS for Indonesia).

♠ 6 ♥ K Q 10 3 ♦ A J 4 3 ♣ 10 8 6 3	♠ AKJ109843 ♥ A 6 4 ♦ 10 ♣ A	**Bidding:**	**East (Adad)**	**South**	**West (Aujaleu)**	**North**
				Pass	**Pass**	**Pass**
			2 ♣	**2♦**	**2 NT**	**Pass**
			3 ♠	**Pass**	**4 ♦**	**Dbl**
			4 ♥	**Pass**	**5 ♦**	**Pass**
			6 ♠	**All Pass**		

The play is straightforward, despite the 4:0 trumps standing. So let's see what the Zar Points "point to":

East has 16+7+11+7 = 41 Zar Points – too much for the "lazy" opening of 4 ♠ (as the commentator named it).
West has 10+3+8+3 = 24. Slam count. The bidding of the French partnership may be just a bit off – the second cue-bid in ♦ should be actually a response-cue-bid ♥ (5♥), but this is mostly a matter of partnership agreement. The Indonesian East opened directly 4 ♠ and played there for +680.

Bermuda Bowl 2003 – Day 2, November 4

I was surprised to see the response to the posting of the comments in Day 1 of the Bermuda Bowl – thank you for all the feedback! There was some concern expressed that the focus is on slam bidding rather than Games (both in the directions of going "overboard" and bidding some aggressive good ones) so I'll try to find such boards, too, in the forth coming discussions. We'll start with some slam swings, though.

Board #7. Australia vs. USA 1

Dealer East, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Freeman-Nickell (EW for USA 1) against Richman-Thompson (NS for Australia). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ A K Q J 2 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ A 10 9 ♣ A 3	♠ 10 8 5 ♥ K Q 7 ♦ K 6 ♣ Q10 652	**Bidding:**	**East (Nickell)**	**South**	**West (Freeman)**	**North**
			Pass	**Pass**	**2 ♣**	**Pass**
			2 NT	**Pass**	**3 ♠**	**Pass**
			6 ♠	**Pass**	**7 ♠**	**All Pass**

No comments on the actual bidding since I don't know what Freeman-Nickell are playing currently – the contracts goes down 1 against 6♠ for 12 tricks in the other room. So let's see what the Zar Points "point to":

East has 10+2+8+3 = 23 Zar Points – certainly pass in the dealer position.

West has 22+9+8+3=42 Zar Points, yielding 63 points before the upgrades, so the foundations for exploring the small slam are there. The upgrades in the East hand would count 1 for the ♠10.

Note that we would have counted additional points with the 75%-rule we utilized in Board #5 above in a similar 7♠ contact, but this was in a case where we DID know that partner's hand is unbalanced.

Here partner reveals a balanced hand with 5♠ with no **secondary suit**, so the 75% of the 4 potential honors in the side suits is not applicable and we just count points for honors and controls in our suits. This brings the total to 64 – still way down into the small-slam zone. The board is a good example to **bundle with Board #5** indeed, the subject being "counting **potential upgrades** with **the 75% rule**".

Board #8. Australia vs. USA 1

Dealer East, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Freeman-Nickell (NS for USA 1) against Richman-Thompson (EW for Australia). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ Q 7 5 2 ♥ 8 5 ♦ Q 6 ♣ Q J 9 7 2	♠ ___ ♥ J 9 7 2 ♦ K 9 8 7 5 2 ♣ K 5 4	**Bidding:** **East (Richman)** **South** **West (Thomson)** **North** **1 ♦** **Pass** **1 ♠** **4 ♠** **All Pass**

Here is what the commentator said:

"Bobby Richman's decision to open the bidding with East hand plus Matthew Thompson's response of 1♠ made it very difficult for Nickell and Freeman to reach the excellent slam (in ♠ that is). Paul Soloway did not consider East hand an opener, clearing the way for another good auction by the Australians (at the other table)".

This is the very SAME board as Board #6 above, but presented with the other 2 hands!

So let's see if the decision to open fits our Zar Points criteria. The hand has 7+2+10+6 = **25 Zar Points**! **NOT** an opener but opened by an expert!!!

We have a winner here! This is the first hand an expert opens that goes below the Zar Points criteria for **aggressive opening!** You realize, that if the 6-card suit was in ♠, rather than in ♦, you would have had an opening hand (meaning opening 1♠, rather than 2♠).

Congratulations, Bobby!

As for the 1♠ response, West has 7+0+9+3 = 19 Zar Points – well into the response area. You certainly notice, that if there is no opening, there would be no response :-) That's the power of pushing your opponents into **defensive** track of bidding that I was talking about.

Board #9. Australia vs. USA 1

Dealer West, ALL VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Soloway-Hamman (NS for USA 1) against Del Monte-Fruewirth (EW for Australia). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ J 7 6 3 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ Q 8 3 ♣ A J 9	K Q 8 5 4 2 6 4 ♦ J 5 2 ♣ 8 2	**Bidding:**	**East (Fruewirth)**	**South**	**West (DelMonte)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**Pass**	**Pass**
			Pass	**1♦**	**Dbl**	**2NT**
			4♠	**All Pass**		

Down 2.

West is a passed hand with close to opening values (a lot of people would have opened the hand due to the 4 controls, the 12 HCP, and the 4-cards in spades, providing a safe re-bid) and East decided not to open **2♠** due to the lack of "texture" or filler-quality of the suit.

Then East fails into **the trap of "showing excessive values"** after the initial pass (your strength doesn't go up by the mere fact that you have already passed). West has 12+4+7+1 = 24 Zar Points going to 25 when you add the 1 pt for holding the spades suit. East has 6+1+9+4 = 20 Zar Points for a total of 44. Adding the 2x3 = 6 for the superfit in Spades still yields only 44+6 = 50 Zar Points – below the Game Level, despite the superfit.

This simple board shows once again why holding the spades suit is worth adding points for your initial decision regarding "to open or not to open" – it provides **safe re-bid at level 1**, on top of the fact that you can buy the contract a the "same level" simply because it's the highest-rank suit.

Board #10. USA vs. Israel (seniors)

Dealer North, E/W VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Baze-Kasle (NS for USA) against Romik-Levit (EW for Israel). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ 10 6 4 3 2 ♥ K J 4 ♦ J 9 ♣ A10 6	♠ K Q 9 8 7 ♥ 9 8 7 ♦ A 6 5 ♣ K 7	**Bidding:**	**East (Romik)**	**South**	**West (Levit)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**1♣**
			1♠	**Pass**	**4♠**	**All Pass**

The question here is simple – do you have the "right" to jump right away to 4♠? So let's count. 9+3+8+3 = 23 Zar Points. For the ♠10 +1, and 2x3 for the superfit – good enough for the Game. You even have some "reserve" to support your partner's "eventually-below 26 Zar Points" overcall at level 1.

There were several slams and grand-slams (both good and bad ones) but they do not offer a **"new angle"** that I am looking for in a board. So we will continue tomorrow evening with the next rounds.

Bermuda Bowl 2003 – Day 3, November 5

Board #11. Italy vs. Pakistan

Dealer South, E/W VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Allana-Fazli (NS for Pakistan) against Bocchi-Duboin (EW for Italy). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ 5 ♥ A Q 9 6 ♦ A 10 9 ♣ K 9 8 7 4	♠ A J 4 ♥ 7 3 ♦ Q J 3 ♣ A Q J 10 2	**Bidding:**	**East (Bocchi)**	**South**	**West (Duboin)**	**North**
			-	**Pass**	**1 ♣**	**2 ♠**
			3 ♣	**3 ♠**	**Dbl**	**Pass**
			4 ♠	**Pass**	**5 ♣**	**Pass**
			6 ♣	**All Pass**		

After the 2 ♠ bid on the left, East excludes any ♠ honor holdings in partners' hand, and having A Q J 10 x in his own hand doesn't leave much in clubs either, so the conclusion of good red-suit holdings is kind-of automatic. Add to this the fact that **the intervention is "in the curve",** with you holding A J in the suit of intervention, so if anything has to be finessed in ♦ and ♥, it probably stays well-placed before partner's good holdings in the red suits. So it is simply logical to **upgrade partner's hand**, looking at your own and listening to the bids. But – let's see what the Zar Points "point to":

East has 15+4+8+3 = 30 Zar Points, that is 4 points above Level 4, before any upgrades and adjustments engendered by the bidding flow.

West has 13+5+9+4 = 31, again before any adjustments. His active bid of **dbl** at level 3 reveals the "reserve" of power as to the initial opening bid so from where East sits, the before-adjustments total is 60+ Zar Points. Add to this the regular superfit upgrades in ♣ and you reach the slam decision.

The interesting question is **why not a GRAND** – what makes us "just" bid 6? The answer is in the fact that we hold basically only the excess of power to move only one level above Level4 and partners refusal to make additional forcing / cue-bid effort says that he doesn't have much "pushing power" either, so both sides of the partnership settle for a small slam. In the other room the contract was 5♣.

Board #12. Italy vs. Pakistan

Dealer East, love all. We will present the bidding again at the table of Allana-Fazli (NS for Pakistan) against Bocchi-Duboin (EW for Italy). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ K 9 2 ♥ Q 8 6 5 2 ♦ 2 ♣ Q J 5 2	♠ Q J 7 ♥ A K J 7 4 ♦ K 8 4 ♣ K 9	**Bidding:**	**East (Fazli)**	**South**	**West (Allana)**	**North**
			1 ♥	**Pass**	**4 ♥**	**Dbl**
			All Pass			

You lose the 3 As for making 10 tricks. The **dbl** is again "before" the opening hand so if something needs to be finessed, it probably stays well.

But – let's see the picture through the Zar Points "sun glasses".

East has 17+5+8+3 = 33 Zar Points – warranting one level "in reserve".

West has 8+1+9+4 = 22 Zar Points, plus 2x3 for the superfit and 1 for the ♥Q – well into the Game Level.

The question here is "What about if East **merely had 26** Zar Points instead? Wouldn't they be able to cut our heads off – all-the-way to the belly-button? :-) Here is the answer. First, since the HCP power is relatively even here, you are "protected" by the Law of Total Tricks. Second, Zar Points themselves are in a sense a **continuation of the research** on The Law of Total Tricks made half-a-century ago (see the remarks of Roger Eymard on this matter in the "Critics and Opinions"), and the main point in this direction is the bigger relative weight of the distribution – Zar Points spread to up-to 26 points while Goren, Bergen, and the rest only go to 13 points. This is to say that you may go down on a 52-point-count eventually, but it would be a well-rewarded "defeat" on the background of the Game or Slam that the opponents would have.

To finish this remark, just let's see what would happen if you throw away partner's 2 red kings – he'd collect 11+3+8+3 = 25 Zar Points – just below 26. And **still** it is a 50% Game.

Board #13. Italy vs. Pakistan

Dealer East, love all. We will present the bidding again at the table of Fantoni - Nunes (NS for Italy) against Jafer-Siddiqui (EW for Pakistan). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ K J 9 7 6 ♥ A 9 8 6 ♦ 7 6 3 ♣ 8	♠ A 10 3 ♥ K 10 7 5 ♦ J 8 5 ♣ Q 9 6	**Bidding:**	**East (Jafer)**	**South**	**West (Siddi qui)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**1 NT**
			Pass	**Pass**	**2♣**	**Pass**
			4♥	**All pass**		

The 2♣ is Cappelletti – promises 9+ cards in the majors. Strength – basically a mystery, but in any case capable of balancing against the 1NT opening of the Italians (keep in mind that the Italian 1NT is what it says – "Italian" :-), meaning that it covers a wider range of hands that you could possible imagine). So let's assume that the Cappelletti bid is made with an opening hand according to the Zar Points standards, that is, West has 26 Zar Points.

"Is East's action reasonable?" is the question at hand. He has 10+3+7+1 = 21 Zar Points. Upgrade ALL your honors in the Majors for **another 4 points** – still less than the Game Level. Plus, since you partner has MAX 4 cards in the minors, it is reasonable to "shave" a point from your 3 points in these suits (at least :-) In bridge you constantly have to use your head, with or without Zar Points :-)

So … simply chose the hearts and stay low with this 4-3-3-3 distribution (if I may use this word for the 4-3-3-3 shape :-)

Now, back to the Cappelletty bid. West has 8+3+9+4 = 24 Zar Points – 2 points below the limit … So no wonder the contract went 3 down. The term **"aggressive"** has a specific meaning …

Board #14. Australia vs. Japan

Dealer North, EW VUL. We will present the bidding again at the table of Nakatani-Naniwada (EW for Japan) against Lester-Lorentz (NS for Australia). Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ A 10 3 ♥ A J 10 ♦ 10 7 ♣ K 10 653	♠ K Q 8 6 4 2 ♥ K ♦ A Q J 4 3 ♣ 7	**Bidding:** **East (Naniwada)** **South** **West (Nakatani)** **North** **-** **-** **-** **1 NT** **2♠** **Pass** **4♠** **All Pass**

Both tables actually played 4♠ - 710 against 680 in the other room. None had even made an attempt for slam. So let's get down to our main business here - what the Zar Points "point to":

East has 15+4+11+5 = 35 Zar Points – that's 9 more than the opening of 26. If you deduct initially a point for the singleton K, it still leaves you with 34 points – 8 in "reserve".

West has 12+5+8+3 = 28 Zar Points. That's a total of 62 before any upgrades and adjustments.

The 1NT opening, though, makes the A Q J in diamonds look like A K Q actually, plus the additional points for the extra length in spades – we arrive at a level of comfort for a slam in spades. And since BOTH of these upgrades are in the East's hand, East is the one who has to make the push.

Board #15. Australia vs. Japan

Dealer North, NS VUL. We will present the bidding again at the table of Nakatani-Naniwada (NS for Japan) against Lester-Lorentz (EW for Australia).

Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ 10 9 8 4 3 ♥ 9 4 ♦ 7 2 ♣ K Q J 8	♠ Q J 5 2 ♥ K 10 5 3 2 ♦ A ♣ A 7 2	**Bidding:** **East (Lorentz)** **South** **West (Lester)** **North** **-** **-** **-** **Pass** **1♥** **Pass** **1♠** **Pass** **3♦** **Pass** **3♥** **3♠** **4♠** **All Pass**

Not much chance for 10 tricks here, so let's see what the Zar Points "point to":

East has 14+5+9+4 = 32 Zar Points – that's 6 more than the opening of 26, i.e. he has the strength to invite for a Game even if he degrades a point for the singleton A.

West has 6+1+9+3 = 19 Zar Points – stands Level 2 but nothing more. No wander the contract went down again.

The other table stayed at 2♠, not even an invitation which is a bit too conservative with the East hand. Just move one of West's hearts to the clubs and make the **distribution 5-5-2-1 instead of 5-4-2-2** and chances for game increase immediately, and so are the Zar Points – reflected by the 2 additional Zar Points you would get for the 5-5-2-1 distribution and the additional "1 Level in reserve" that West gets with the newly calculated 21 Zar Points.

I hope after these first 3 days we can comfortably count the Zar Points and begin recognizing the thinking behind them, both in the Game and in the Slam zone.

Bermuda Bowl 2003 – Day 4, November 6

Board #16. Egypt vs. Brazil

Dealer North, ALL VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Kamel-Shaker (EW for Egypt) against Mooney-Monsegur (NS for Brazil). A short due note – it's a combined team between Brazil and Argentina, representing Zone 3, but I will for short use just the name of Brazil.

Here are the hands and the bids.

♠ A 8 2 ♥ 10 4 ♦ Q 10 9 7 6 5 ♣ A 6	♠ K 7 6 4 ♥ A J 6 5 3 2 ♦ 3 ♣ K Q	**Bidding:**	**East (Kamel)**	**South**	**West (Shaker)**	**North**
			-	-	-	**Pass**
			1 ♥	**Dbl**	**RDbl**	**Pass**
			2 ♥	**Pass**	**3 ♥**	**Pass**
			4 ♥	**All Pass**		

Nothing special at first glance, but this board would allow us to follow once again the logic in Zar Points re-evaluation and the way you decide between the dilemmas "to invite-or-to-pass" and "to-accept-or-to-pass", so don't get upset by the seemingly unnecessary attention and space it gets here..

East has 13+4+10+5 = 32 initial Zar Points. Deduct one for the K Q blank in clubs, and you end up with 31 initial points. Looks encouraging at first glance. But watch how quickly that picture changes BEFORE your partner has even opened his mouth – take-out double "behind" you.

The Rdbl from partner shows 10+ HCP, meaning that the negative **double is on distribution** rather than general power, which in turn means that your secondary suit spades is "supported" by the **opponent in your back**, rather than your partner – the worst possible scenario, even if you had an A there rather than a K before the "possible" A. On top of that, it's in a secondary suit where your holdings amount to a **bare K** in a "ghost-suit" with **no body** (meaning no fillers like 10s and 9s). Normally you deduct the amount of one level (5 Zar Points) when your secondary suit is held by the opponent in your back, but with a suit headed by a bare K you can be even more cautious.

West has 10+4+9+4 = 27 Zar Points. Hey, that's a GAME here!

27 Zar Points against an opening (let alone the fact that East has 5 more points "in reserve" on the initial count before the negative double). So … where is the problem?

The problem is that the 26+26 is THE rule to calculate Games in Major when

1) there is **no duplication** (i.e. 52 is the MINIMUM required for a Game) and
2) you have a direct fit of **min 3 cards** for the Major suit where you intend to play the Game in.

Let's **keep the distribution** points (a+b) + (a-d) the same for West, 9+4=13, and only move one spade to the hearts, so that the distribution is **still 6-3-2-2** but with **3 hearts** instead. All the points of BOTH partners stay **the same**, yet the hands are now sitting much better for a Game **despite the duplication in clubs**! Here are the "new" hands only after changing the 8 of spades to 8 of hearts:

♠ A 2 ♥ 10 8 4 ♦ Q 10 9 7 6 5 ♣ A 6	♠ K 7 6 4 ♥ A J 6 5 3 2 ♦ 3 ♣ K Q	**Bidding:**	**East (Kamel)**	**South**	**West (Shaker)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**Pass**
			1 ♥	**Dbl**	**RDbl**	**Pass**
			2 ♥	**Pass**	**3 ♥**	**Pass**
			4 ♥	**All Pass**		

Much better picture, you would agree - looks like a relief to look at the prospects now, despite the duplication and the fact that South holds the spades suit. The actual contract at the table went 2 down.

I will go through some more boards and post something new tonight if I find a discussion-trigger :-)

Bermuda Bowl 2003 – Day 5, November 7

Board #17. Australia vs. USA 2

Dealer West, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Antoff-Simpson (EW for Australia) against Wolff-Morse (NS for USA 2). A short due note – Theo Antoff for Australia is one of the Bermuda Bowl players who uses Zar Points in his bidding-judgment process. An old friend and a former partner of mine – author of the TANK bidding system and the book with same title. Here are the EW hands and the bidding itself.

♠ A K 8 7 ♥ J 7 6 5 4 ♦ K 7 ♣ A J	♠ J 7 ♥ A 9 8 2 ♦ Q 8 7 5 4 ♣ 8 6	**Bidding:**	**East (Simpson)**	**South**	**West (Antoff)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**1 ♥**	**Pass**
			2 ♥	**Pass**	**4 ♥**	**All Pass**

West has 16+6+9+3 = 34 Zar Points with an eventual depreciation for the AJ blank in clubs, if this turn out to be outside of the partners suit (which actually is the case). Since he is at the upper-end of the 31-35 Zar Points, Antoff decides to hide his secondary spades suit for tactical lead-direction purposes and jumps directly to Game.

East has 7+2+9+3 = 21 with an eventual depreciation of ♠J, if it turns out that ♠ is not partner's secondary suit (which actually is not the case this time).

So if Antoff would have bid 2♠ for invitation, East would reverse back the 1 depreciation point and add one more for honor in the partner's suit and would bit the 4♥ himself.

In the other room the contract was 1 NT +2.

Board #18. Denmark vs. Indonesia (seniors)

Dealer North, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Lasut-Manoppo (NS for Indonesia) against Lund-Moller (EW for Denmark). Here are the EW hands and the bidding.

♠ A 10 8 7 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 8 7 ♦ 10 9 ♣ ___	♠ K J 6 ♥ A 6 ♦ A K 4 3 ♣ J 10 5 4	**Bidding:**	**East (Lund)**	**South**	**West (Moller)**	**North**
			-	-	-	**Pass**
			1 ♣	**Pass**	**1 ♠**	**Pass**
			1 NT	**Pass**	**2 ♦**	**Pass**
			2 ♠	**Pass**	**3 ♠**	**Pass**
			4 ♦	**Pass**	**4 NT**	**Pass**
			5 ♦	**Pass**	**5 ♠**	**Pass**
			6 ♦	**Pass**	**7 ♠**	**All Pass**

Nice biding. So nice that it was presented for the "Best Bid Hand" of the tournament. The 2 ♦ was GF asking for the type of support in spades – and 2 ♠ promised 3 cards thee. The 4 ♦ by East denies club control and promises ♦ control (the first good sign – not much duplication in clubs). Then 5 ♦ is RKB 14-03 promises 0 or 3. The 5 ♠, believe it or not, is a sign-off, because East may have 0 with you holding 1 of the 5. This also reveals another thing of their bidding process – the 4 ♦ cue-bid could have been a K (since he accepts and acts upon the possibility of 0 key cards), which in turn reveals yet another interesting thing – the fact that East denies both A and K in clubs.

This brings us to the 6 ♦ bid, which serves two purposes – second cue-bid in ♦ (A and K) and indirectly denies the ♠ Q, in the presence of which he would bid 5 NT. So now, the 7♠ is a clear bid. Let's get back to our "calculators" now :-)

East has 16+6+8+2 = 32 Zar Points. With the 2 additional points in spades and one in hearts for the secondary partner suit it goes to 35. West has 9+3+11+7 = 30 Zar Points from which 20 are from distribution! So we are at the 62-Zone, which is a small slam that basically anybody would bid "shooting from the hip".

To make matters worse, have a look at the following "slightly" modified hand of East – same HCP, same distribution, same controls, same fit and support in both main and secondary partner's suit, same Zar Points:

♠ A 10 8 7 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 8 7 ♦ 10 9 ♣ ___	♠ K J 6 ♥ A 6 ♦ J 10 5 4 ♣ A K 4 3	**Bidding:**	**East (Lund)**	**South**	**West (Moller)**	**North**

Scary stuff … :-) So how would we fight here? We count 62 Zar Points and bid 6, +1 in the first case and -1 in the second, neither one being good enough :-)

This is a very good example to stress the importance of the **duplication** and the **footprints** calculations we touched upon in the "The Footprints" section of the article. Your slam-bidding techniques that you have in your natural bidding system like cue-bids, key-cards asking, and your different Grand Slam conventions like Josephine etc. are there to be used along with the Zar Points hand evaluation, as this "reversed example" shows clearly. Your slam-bidding techniques should be aimed at the general goal of slam-bidding – to enable you to **mentally play** the entire contract before the dummy opens up. This is certainly an irrelevant bidding strategy for a part-score, but for slam bidding it is not. In the actual hand presented in this Board #18 this is exactly what you can do after knowing that your partner has Kxx in spades, A of hearts, and AK in diamonds, virtually regardless of the rest of his actual holdings in both ♥ and ♦. The 62 Zar Points guarantee you **the room** to explore these possibilities with your tools of choice. As this natural bidding example shows, it is not mandatory to resort to the "artificial footprints and duplication calculations" we have hinted about in the article.

Board #19. Australia vs. USA 2

Dealer West, EW VUL. We will again present the bidding at the table of Antoff-Simpson (EW for Australia) against Wolff-Morse (NS for USA 2). Here are the EW hands and the bidding.

♠ K Q 8 7 ♥ A Q 9 ♦ Q 10 8 5 ♣ 4 2	♠ J 10 ♥ J 10 8 7 5 4 ♦ A 3 ♣ K Q 5	**Bidding:**	**East (Simpson)**	**South**	**West (Antoff)**	**North**
			-	**-**	**1 ♦**	**Pass**
			1 ♥	**Pass**	**1 ♠**	**Pass**
			2 NT	**Pass**	**3 NT**	**All Pass**

There were some interesting moments during the bidding on this board. After the 1♦ opening of Antoff, Bobby Wolff took some time thinking whether to overcall 2 ♣ or pass (his club holding is A J 10 9 6 which would have been a vital lead-direction intervention (holding-up the A of clubs twice to keep the communication with his partner open), but he decided to pass.

Antoff also had his dilemmas to worry about. With 3 hearts and a small double in clubs, he had the alternative bid of 3♥, but decided that the ruffing values he would offer for a contract in ♥ would have been with high trumps that would be vital in an eventual 4-3 fit in H (if partner has only 4 hearts). Thus he bid 3 NT directly.

One more thing you might have noticed about Antoff's hand – he is the "NT-oriented" range of 1-3 controls rather than the trump-oriented range of 4-6 controls (see "The Anti-aggression" section of the Zar Points article).

West has 13+3+8+2 = 26 Zar Poins. East has 11+3+9+4 = 27 Zar Points, reduced initially to 26 for doubleton J in ♠. Game-balance with a nice 3NT decision made by Antoff for another good swing against USA 2. Australia won the match 17-13.

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Board #20. Canada vs. Chinese Taipei

Dealer West, ALL VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Wolpert-Demuy (EW for Canada) against Huang-Wu (NS for Taipei). Here are the EW hands and the bidding itself.

♠ A 5 4 2 ♥ ___ ♦ K Q 7 5 4 3 ♣ 10 9 5	♠ K Q 8 3 ♥ K Q 2 ♦ A ♣ A K 732	**Bidding:**	**East (Wu)**	**South**	**West (Huang)**	**North**
			1 ♣	**Pass**	**1 ♦**	**Pass**
			2 ♠	**Pass**	**4 ♥**	**Pass**
			4 ♠	**All Pass**		

East has 21+7+9+4 = 41 Zar Points. West has 9+3+10+6 = 28 Zar Points before the upgrades in spades. It is true, that the hearts duplication will drag the evaluation down, but not by much keeping in mind the compensating upgrades for the trump suit. The overall total is way above 62 Zar Points after any downgrade for duplication and to me both sides, after the reverse of E, are in a position to continue exploring the space.

Board #21. Canada vs. Chinese Taipei

Dealer South, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Wolpert-Czyziwicz (EW for Canada) against Huang-Wu (NS for Taipei). Here are the EW hands and the bidding itself.

♠ 4 ♥ Q 5 4 3 ♦ A 8 7 4 3 ♣ 10 3 2	♥ A K J 8 7 ♦ ___ ♣ A K Q J87	**Bidding:**	**East (Wu)** **-** **4 NT** **5 ♥**	**South** **4 ♠** **Pass** **All Pas**	**West (Huang)** **Pass** **5 ♦**	**North** **Pass** **Pass**

Another board under severe swift squeeze of the bidding space. East has 18+6+11+6 = 41 Zar Points. West has 6+2+9+4 = 21 Zar Points before the upgrades in hearts. The rough total is 62 Zar Points before the upgrades. May be to your surprise (since East is by far the stronger hand), it is West who should move after the 5 ♥ bid, which clearly shows a hand powerful enough to bid at level 5 for the first time (essentially) and with a clear-cut two-suiter in hearts and clubs. The duplication in diamonds is not clear for W, and the key is that **he controls** both side suits for his partner, on top of the superfit in hearts. Good place to quote Bob Hamman once again: “The best play badly, and the rest are awful” :-)

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Board #22. Quarter Final Bulgaria vs. Norway

Dealer West, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Stamatov-Gunev (NS for Bulgaria) vs. Brogeland-
Saelensmind (EW for Norway).

♠ A Q 9 6 4 ♥ 7 ♦ 8 5 4 ♣ A 10 3 2	♠ . ♥ . ♦ . ♣ .	**Bidding:**	**East** **-**	**South** **-**	**West** **1 ♠**	**North**

You probably think that the missing East hand and the unfinished bidding is a typo here :-)

Not really - just a "fresh air" in the Bermuda Bowl presentation :-)

After West opened the hand with 1 Spade, a Question was posed at the Vu-Graph: "Would anyone open this hand?". Guess what - I was intrigued! I was about to here answers from expert commentators here "just-like-that", without ME posing the question, thus kind-of suggesting or guiding the answer.

And the answers varied from "Never" to "Not Me" ... This hand has 10+4+9+4 = 27 Zar Points and a good Spades suit to top-up your decision for opening with 28 initial Zar Points.

Just imagine the amount of conservatism among the upper-20% of the bridge field (where the commentators of a vu-graph undoubtedly are), let alone the 80% of the field.

My rough estimate, after talking with so many experts on this issue, would be that about only **the top 1%**, if that many, of the bridge-playing world, actually bids with the type of aggression Zar Points present. And this is despite the fact that virtually every expert would answer **"Yes"** to a question like "Do you think that aggressive bidding is worth adopting", if the question is asked outside the context of any board. The most aggressive bidders outside the top 1% basically use the Rule of 20 and a hand like the one in this board **wouldn't qualify** – it collects only 19 points, which was the reason the experts-commentators said "No" to this **nice aggressive-bidding hand.**

Board #23. Quarter Final Poland vs. USA 2

Dealer N, WE VUL. We will present the events at the table of Landen-Rajadhyaksh (EW for USA) against Gawrys-Jassem (NS for Poland). Here is the record:

♠ A K J 7 2 ♥ A K 7 ♦ 4 2 ♣ Q 7 3	♠ 8 5 4 ♥ Q 3 2 ♦ ___ ♣ AK10 9864	**Bidding:**	**East** - **Pass** **Dbl** **5♠**	**South** - **2♥** **4♦** **All Pass**	**West** - **2♠** **Pass**	**North** **Pass** **3♣** **5♦**

Fred Gitelman at the Vu-Graph mentioned that he would pass too, if in the East's position, which I find remarkable (Fred is the top Canadian player and the guy who runs Bridge Base Online, one of the top-3 Bridge-related Websites in the world: www.bridgebase.com, check it out)! East has 9+3+10+7 = **29 Zar Points**! Match this with the 1% of the aggressive players I was talking about in the previous board! NOTE - this hand does NOT fit the Rule of 20 either - again **failing with 19 points.**

At this table, the 5♠ contract made +1. Closed room - 7SDbl - 2. Fred Gitelman's comment at the Vu-Graph was that W can bid 6S "on general principles", to use his words, but E is here more to blame, I believe, even if he doesn't open the hand. A 7c contract hangs on a finess here, while it is feasible to run the risk of CL ruff after the ♥-♦ two-suiter shown by the 2♥ bid of East, if you end-up in a ♠ contract .

Board #24. USA1 vs. Indonesia (seniors)

Dealer S, EW VUL. We will present the events at the table of Woolsey-Robinson (EW for USA) against Lasut-Manoppo (NS for Indonesia). Here are the hands and the bidding:

♠ 8 ♥ A K Q 10 5 ♦ A J 7 ♣ A Q 6 5	♠ 10 6 4 3 2 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ 4 3 2 ♣ K 8	**Bidding:**	**East** - **2♥**	**South** **Pass** **Pass**	**West** **1♥** **4♥**	**North** **Pass** **All Pass**

The other table stopped at **3♥**, but Kit Woolsey didn't even hesitate for a moment to bid the Game. So let's see who's right and who's wrong from Zar Points perspective.

West has 19+7+9+4 = 39 Zar Points! This is 2 ½ Levels above the 26-points opening! East has 5+1+8+3 = 17 Zar Points, bare raise to **2♥**. But West has more than enough to jump to Game and no wonder Kit did it.

I honestly do not see what could possibly stop West from bidding the Game, with or without Zar Points here.

Board #25. Quarter Final USA1 vs. Chinese Taipei

Dealer W, NS VUL. We will present the events at the table of Freeman-Nickell(EW for USA) against Yang-Chiu (NS for Taipei). Here are the hands and the bidding:

Please, pay attention to the fact that the bidding starts with West being on the left-hand side of the bidding box, rather than starting with the bids of East.

♠ A Q 8 6 4 ♥ K 2 ♦ ___ ♣ A Q 10 876	♠ K 9 ♥ A 6 5 ♦ A Q 10 8 5 3 ♣ K J	**Bidding: West (Freeman) North East (Nickell) South** **1♣ Pass 1♦ Pass** **1♠ Pass 2♥ Pass** **3♠ Pass 4♣ Pass** **4♥ Pass 4♠ Pass** **5♣ Pass 5♥ Pass** **5♠ Pass 5NT Pass** **7♣ All Pass**

Seven rounds of bidding, while other pairs landed at 7♠ by the end if the 3rd round – but any rout is good to a GRAND (as long as it makes :-). So let's see if we have the Zar Points power insuring the overall prospects for the slam in a very early stage, as you already know.

West has 15+5+11+6 = 37 Zar Points – more than 2 Levels in "reserve".
East has 17+6+9+4 = 36 Zar Points before any upgrades. The♣J is immediately promoted rather than being degraded as part of the K J blank, since this is one of partners' suits.

So 73+ Zar Points – points galore so to say … Even after degrading for the duplication in ♦, you are well above the level needed for a GRAND. All you need to make sure is that the needed controls are in place, using your slam-bidding conventions and tools.

We will continue tomorrow with the last 2 rounds of the Quarter finals.

Bermuda Bowl 2003 –Day 8, November 10

After the last 2 rounds, we learned the semifinalists: USA1 vs. USA2 and Italy vs. Norway. Let's congratulate the teams of Australia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Chinese Taipei for their achievement of playing at the Quarter Finals!

Board #26. Quarter Final Bulgaria vs. Norway

Dealer North, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Stamatov-Gunev (EW for Bulgaria) vs. Grotheim-Aa (NS for Norway).

♠ J 8 2 ♥ J 10 7 5 3 ♦ 9 4 ♣ A J 10	♠ 7 6 5 ♥ A K 6 2 ♦ A J ♣ K 9 6 4	**Bidding: East South West North** **- - - 3♦** **Pass Pass 3♥ All Pass**

You certainly know the rule that the balancing hand bids with the points of both hands (his and his partner's that is) but still let's see the Zar Points perspective on this. This is a different perspective of the already discussed bidding under severe cuts of the bidding space by pre-empts, this time in balancing position.

Let's see what West's holding accounts for in Zar Points terms. He has 7+2+8+3 = 20 Zar Points which would qualify him for a raise to level 2 if his partner opens the bidding (with 26 Zar Points). On the plus side, he has a Spades tolerance in a "case of emergency", but I tend to stick with the rule "Why should I go down when they can go down" in such higher-level decisions. Indeed, even if the declared (in diamonds) guesses the trumps right, he'd still go down actually before he even comes to the point of guessing the trumps. Let alone the chance of being doubled in your hearts contract. East has a very good hand with 15+6+8+2 = **31 Zar Points before the upgrades in** ♥! Just imagine what would have happened if he had an opening hand of 26 (assumed for the balancing) and no upgrades in ♥ - "head-chop all-the-way down to the belly button" again :-)

Both tables balanced with 3♥, both went down 2 for a flat board (no double no trouble :-).

Board #27. Quarter Final Bulgaria vs. Norway

Dealer North, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Stamatov-Gunev (NS for Bulgaria) vs. Grotheim-Aa (EW for Norway).

♠ A 10 6 ♥ Q 10 5 3 2 ♦ K J 7 ♣ 10 6	♠ 8 7 5 2 ♥ 9 ♦ 8 4 3 2 ♣ Q 5 3 2	**Bidding:**	**East** **-** **All Pass**	**South** **-**	**West** **1♥**	**North** **Dbl**

This is a good example of an Anti-Zar-Points opening with **5 cards Major** and **3 Controls** and **10 HCP** and **3 10s**! Sounds pretty good, right?

So, let's count: 10+3+8+3 = **24 Zar Points**. No opener. And the result shows it – 4 down at level 1, doubled.

Board #28. Quarter Final USA 2 vs. Poland

Dealer South, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Landen-Morse (NS for USA2).

♠ 10 ♥ K 9 ♦ K Q 9 7 6 4 3 ♣ J 10 2	♠ J 9 3 2 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ A J 10 ♣ A 4	**Bidding:**	**East** **-** **Dbl** **3♦**	**South** **Pass** **Pass** **3♠**	**West(Landen)** **1♦** **2♦** **All Pass**	**North** **1♥** **Dbl**

You realize that the discussion here would revolve around the opening of West, rather than the prosaic final contract. The discussion was actually started when Eric Kokish made a prediction (as the Vu-Graph commentator) that Landed would open 1♦, rather than pre-empting with 3♦. Still more interesting was that the prediction was correct! Steven Landed opened 1♦ indeed (in the other room the opening was 3♦).

So (you guessed it :-), let's count.

West holds 9+2+10+6 = **27 Zar Points**! Both Eric and Steven Landed were correct!

Would you open it? I certainly hope so …

Bermuda Bowl 2003 –Day 9, November 11

The Semifinals started today. Both of them running pretty tight.

Board #29. Semifinal Italy vs. Norway

Dealer East, ES VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Helgemo-Helnes (EW for Norway) vs. Lauria-Versace (NS for Italy).

♠ A Q 10 5 ♥ Q 4 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ 9 8 5 2	♠ K J 7 4 2 ♥ 9 8 5 ♦ A J 7 5 3 ♣ ___	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			2♦	**Pass**	**3♣**	**Pass**
			3♦	**Dbl**	**4♠**	**4NT**
			Dbl	**5♣**	**Dbl**	**All Pass**

The 2♦ opening is a sub-opening two-suiter with either spades-diamonds or clubs-hearts. The 3♣ is a preference requiring pass if this is one of the suits, after that everything is natural. The contract in clubs goes down 1 for 100, while in the other room it was 4♠ +2 for 680. The contract in spades at level 5 is obviously safe.

You certainly understand the question here – **is East's hand a sub-opening** or an opening hand. If it is advertised as a sub-opening one, then partner won't be able to make the correct judgment at a higher level, which was exactly the case in this 11-IMP swing. So, let's count.

East has 9+3+10+5 = **27 Zar Points**. A normal opening which would have permitted partner to take the correct decision as the bidding progresses.

Board #30. Semifinal Italy vs. Norway

Dealer North, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Grotheim-Aa (EW for Norway) vs. Nunes-Fantoni (NS for Italy).

♠ J 10 ♥ A K Q J 4 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ 9 8 2	♠ A K Q 8 5 ♥ 10 8 7 5 2 ♦ ___ ♣ 6 4 3	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**3♦**
			3♠	**Pass**	**3 NT**	**Pass**
			4♥	**Pass**	**6♥**	**All Pass**

This board is interesting with a number of things. To begin, in West's position Jeff Meckstroth also bid the slam, although in all fairness the auction was opened with 3NT which is a pre-empt with an unknown minor. The fact is that both USA 1 and Norway went to slam widely open in one of the suits with 3 direct losers from the lead.

Here is another look at a "similar" board, where the minors of East are simply switched:

♠ J 10 ♥ A K Q J 4 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ 9 8 2	♠ A K Q 8 5 ♥ 10 8 7 5 2 ♦ 6 4 3 ♣ ___	**Bidding:**	**East** - **3♠** **4♥**	**South** - **Pass** **Pass**	**West** - **3 NT** **6♥**	**North** **3♦** **Pass** **All Pass**

Everything's the same – Zar Points including. But now it is a genuine GRAND, while in the first case it is **3 Levels** below. This only comes to stress again a point made in a previous board that you have to **explore your controls** on the way to a slam, with or without Zar Points. Or **do you really?** Listen to this:

Both teams scored 13 tricks after a diamond lead.

This brings up the second point – the considerations of both possible swing and a wrong lead in the fog of quick and unclear bidding – unclear for both declarer and defenders! How about adding the consideration of you staying behind in a match and other "side effects" … Such **tactical bids** do have their own merits and no point-count would matter there. That's what makes bridge such an interesting and human game.

The third point that a board like this brings is he **lead-direction activities** at the table… Neither USA 2 nor Italy made an effort in this direction, when from their perspective (having A Q in clubs) the "save" diamond lead" is almost certain. A lead-directing double would have forbidden a diamond lead, and since spades are the other bid suit, the "natural" lead after the double would have been club for -3 – that's on top of the general rule commanding an active lead (A if you have one) in a slam contract reached in wild jumps in the darkness. If the contract makes anyway, it would be a loss of a couple of IMS, while finding the proper active lead is way into the double-digits territory.

The forth point worth mentioning here is that neither West nor East are **in a position to explore the controls** here once they are pressed without any such information to Level 4. Both have no control (not even 3-rd round control!) in clubs, so once they go above level 4, they'll only help the defense to find the proper lead. Interesting board …

Bermuda Bowl 2003 –Day 10, November 12

Board #31. Semifinal USA 1 vs. USA 2

Dealer North, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Hamman-Soloway (EW for USA 1) vs. Doub-Wildavsky (NS for USA 2).

♠ K Q 10 9 2 ♥ 9 6 2 ♦ 6 ♣ K 9 4 2	♠ A 6 4 ♥ A J 10 8 5 3 ♦ A K J 4 ♣ ___	**Bidding:**	**East** - **1♣** **3♥** **6♥**	**South** - **2♣** **Pass** **All Pass**	**West** - **2♠** **4♥**	**North** **Pass** **3♣** **Pass**

The 2♠ bid is positive with 5 cards in ♠, which gives Hamman a good upgrade of his Axx holdings in this suit. After getting support in hearts on top of that, Hamman jumps to slam. So let's see what the Zar Points "point to":

East has 17+7+10+6 = 40 Zar Points – a pretty powerful amount!

West has 8+2+9+4 = 23 Zar Points for a total of over the slam level of 62+. The degrading of ♣K against void is compensated by the spades support in East and the ruffing power in diamonds for West – if you get back to the **new Zar Ruffing Power calculations** on page 15 of the Zar Points (download the **latest 44-page version**, you'll enjoy it) you'll see that the ruffing power of West alone would stand at 2 Zar Points.

Good judgment by the Hamman-Soloway partnership – the slam was missed in the other room for yet another swing for USA 1.

Board #32. Semifinal Italy vs. Norway

Dealer South, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Fantoni-Nunes (EW for Italy) vs. Helgemo-Helnes (NS for Norway).

♠ A 9 7 ♥ J 10 5 4 ♦ A K Q 10 ♣ K 3	♠ Q 8 3 2 ♥ A K Q 9 6 2 ♦ J 9 ♣ A	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	**Pass**	**1♣**	**Pass**
			2♥	**Pass**	**2 NT**	**Pass**
			3♠	**Pass**	**4♣**	**Pass**
			5♣	**Pass**	**6♥**	**All Pass**

The 3♠ bid shows at least 6-4 and the subsequent bids in clubs are cue-bids. West's jump to slam closes the door to the GRAND and it is him who holds total control in diamonds – a diamond cue-bid would encourage East to climb to the grand slam. It is 13 cold top-tricks, played at 7♥ in the other room. So let's count.

The opener West has 17+6+8+2 = 33 Zar Points. East has 16+5+10+5 = 37 Zar Points before any upgrades.

East has **Zar Ruffing Power** upgrades of 2 points in clubs and 1 in diamonds for a total of 3 (this is the value of his **6th trump**, in case you haven't read the Zar Ruffing Power calculations for your extra trumps on the main Zar Points page) so he ends up with **38** after the degrading of ♦J for which he has no information preventing him from the degrade.
East has 3 points from the honors in the majors plus 1 for the extra trump (due to the side doubleton) for a total of **37** Zar Points after the upgrades. This goes to 75 points – way up from the Grand Slam base.

This little hurdle did not preclude Italy from winning the match, though. We have just learned that the Final is USA 1 vs. Italy.

Congratulations to the finalists! And to Norway and USA 2 for their strong Semifinal fights!

Bermuda Bowl 2003 –Day 11, November 13

Board #33. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

This was the very first board of the final. Dealer North, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Lauria-Versace (EW fro Italy) vs. Nickell-Freeman (NS for USA 1).

♠ J 10 8 3 ♥ Q 7 2 ♦ Q J 9 2 ♣ 10 5	♠ K 9 6 4 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ A 5 ♣ A K 9 6	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**Pass**
			2♦	**Pass**	**3♣**	**Pass**
			3♥	**Pass**	**3♠**	**Pass**
			4♠	**All Pass**		

The contract makes, but at the other table the very aggressive pair Meckwell didn't even make an attempt. They played calmly at 1 NT. So let's count.

East has 18+8+8+2 = 36 Zar Points. Boy, this hand has 8 controls! I honestly cannot believe Meckwell stood at 1 NT.
West has 6+0+8+2 = 16 Zar Points – just enough to move on, and East would calculate the 52 Zar Points immediately.

Oops … sorry, I forgot Jeff and Eric don't play Zar Points (yet :-).

Board #34. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer South, EW VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Rodwell-Meckstroth (EW for USA 1) vs. Fantoni-Nunes (NS for Italy).

♠ 8 ♥ A K Q 9 7 5 2 ♦ J 4 ♣ K 10 6	♠ J 9 5 3 ♥ J 10 4 ♦ A Q 8 7 ♣ A 9	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			4♥	**All Pass**		

Sorry – not much of a bidding action here :-) Don't doubt for a sec that Eric doesn't know it is an opening hand! If the suit was Spades, he would have opened 1 ♠. But here the **4♥** opening makes it much harder for the opponents to eventually find a potential good sac at 4♠. Note, that at the other table the opening was 1♥ and still they didn't make a n attempt to reach this I almost 50% slam. So, let's count.

West has 13+4+10+6 = 33 Zar Points, 32 with the deduction for the doubleton J in diamonds.

East has 12+4+8+2 = 26 Zar Points before upgrades. That lifts the rough estimate of the Play Level up to Level 5. The upgrades for heart honors, ruffing power (another point) and the A in the second longest suit would add up to a border-line decision for a slam. However, for tactical reasons I tend to agree with Eric's decision to open the hand at Game level.

Board #35. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer North, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Rodwell-Meckstroth (NS for USA 1) vs. Fantoni-Nunes (EW for Italy).

♠ K Q 8 4 ♥ Q J ♦ 10 ♣ K J 6532	♠ A 10 9 7 5 ♥ A 7 ♦ A K 7 3 2 ♣ 7	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**Pass**
			1♠	**Pass**	**2♣**	**Pass**
			2♦	**Pass**	**2♠**	**Pass**
			3♦	**Pass**	**3♠**	**Pass**
			4♣	**Pass**	**4♦**	**Pass**
			4♥	**Pass**	**4♠**	**Pass**
			5♦	**Pass**	**6♠**	**All Pass**

Nickell-Freeman stopped at Game in the other room – another 11 IMPs for Italy. So let's count.

East has 15+7+10+4 = 36 Zar Points – 2 Levels above opening.

West has 12+2+10+5 = 29, minus 1 for QJ in hearts (initial degrading) for 28 points. Add 2 points for the trump honors and 2 more for the additional trump length (with side singleton – se the **"Zar Ruffing Power"** in the article) for a total of 32 Zar Points in support for spades contract. So – **68 Zar Points**, still counting the degraded QJ in Hears for 2, and despite the awful combination in clubs.

Board #36. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer North, EW VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Hamman-Soloway (EW for USA 1) vs. Bocchi-Duboin (NS for Italy).

♠ K 8 7 5 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ A 10 7 6 ♣ 9 4	♠ J 10 4 ♥ K J 8 7 6 2 ♦ 8 2 ♣ A 5	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	**-**	**-**	**1♣**
			1♥	**Pass**	**2♣**	**Pass**
			2♥	**Pass**	**3♥**	**Pass**
			4♥	**All Pass**		

This time it is a different kind of swing for the Italians – 200 here from "down 2" versus part-score in ♥ in the other room. So let's count again:

East has 9+3+9+4 = 25 Zar Points. **Not an opening** hand (overcalls are lighter than openings in general bidding), which means immediately that accepting the invitation for Game is 'too-pushy', to use my 'politically-correct' arsenal again.

West has 11+5+8+2 = 26 Zar Points – a Game hand against a genuine opening hand. Note, that 2♥ as a response to the cue-bid already has hinted minimal hand and since **the invitation came after** that, the invitation basically asks exactly this question –

"Do you have a genuine opening hand, or is it a light overcall".

Board #37. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer North, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Rodwell-Meckstroth (EW for USA 1) vs. Fantoni-Nunes (NS for Italy).

♠ 10 5 ♥ A Q J 7 4 ♦ 10 8 4 ♣ J 4 3	♠ A K 8 7 6 4 ♥ K 10 6 ♦ A K ♣ K Q	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	-	-	**Pass**
			1♣	**Pass**	**1♠**	**Pass**
			2♣	**Pass**	**2♥**	**Pass**
			3♥	**Pass**	**4♦**	**Pass**
			4♥	**All Pass**		

Another slam bid and made by the Italians … and missed by Meckwell. So let's count again:

East has 22+8+9+4 = 43 Zar Points. Make them 42 for the blank honors in clubs.

West has 8+2+8+3 = 21 Zar Points – one level above "simple raise". That's 64 with the degrading and without the upgrades. Clearly very cautious (didn't I find the proper 'politically-correct' word :-) bidding by the best American partnership in the first rounds of the match. The Italians play the slam in the other room for 12 tricks.

There were **many** boards in the beginning of the match where the Italians were much more aggressive than USA1 and the result in the opening 3 rounds of the Final showed that – **111 : 79** for Italy.

As the commentator in the Vu-Graph room put it – "Italians like to be busy in the bidding".

Bermuda Bowl 2003 –Day 12, November 14

Board #38. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer East, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Fantoni-Nunes (EW for Italy) vs. Meckstroth-Rodwell (NS for USA 1).

♠ K Q 4 3 ♥ 3 2 ♦ J 10 942 ♣ A J	♠ 10 9 8 6 5 2 ♥ A K Q J ♦ A 8 ♣ 5	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	-	-	**Pass**
			1♠	**Pass**	**2♦**	**Pass**
			2♥	**Pass**	**2♠**	**Pass**
			2NT	**Pass**	**3♣**	**Pass**
			3♠	**Pass**	**4♣**	**Pass**
			4♦	**Pass**	**4♠**	**Pass**
			4NT	**Pass**	**5♣**	**Pass**
			5♦	**Pass**	**6♠**	**All Pass**

Quite a long sequence for a contract with no chances … May be this is part of "liking to be busy in the bidding" :-) The events in the other room went strait **1♠-4♠**, no questions asked, for +1. So let's count.

East has 14+5+10+5 = 34 Zar Points – more than 32 for 1 Level in reserve, even if you discount the hearts holding a bit.

West has 11+3+9+3 = 26 Zar Points, discounted to 25 for the blank honors in clubs, and upgraded by 2 for the honors in spades and 1 for the extra length with side double, for a total of 28.

So the potential is there for the slam to be explored (**borderline** total of about 61-62), if everything "is working", meaning no duplication of points, no bad discount-combinations like "A against void or K against singleton" etc. As mentioned several times so far, this **warrants you exploration space** (and indeed, there are strait 11 tricks on the table) but your slam-bidding arsenal should enable you to examine the final prospects.

Board #39. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer East, love all. We will present the bidding at the table of Fantoni-Nunes (EW for Italy) vs. Meckstroth-Rodwell (NS for USA 1).

♠ 9 ♥ A Q862 ♦ 10 7 ♣ A K643	♠ A 10 8 6 ♥ K 10 5 4 ♦ A Q 9 ♣ 10 9	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			1 NT	**2♦**	**Dbl**	**Pass**
			2♥	**Pass**	**3♦**	**Pass**
			3♠	**Pass**	**4♥**	**All Pass**

At the other table the Americans play the slam for a good 10 IMP swing, so let's see what the prospects are from Zar Points perspective.

East has 13+5+8+2 = 28 Zar Points, 31 with the upgrades in the trump (2+1).

West has 13+5+10+4 = 32 Zar Points which brings the total to **above 62 Zar Points** with **no duplication** in sight. Note that from controls view point EW hold **10 of the 12 controls** on the table – a good indication by itself that slam exploration is worth the try.

When you add the total control in 2 of the 4 suits (except diamonds) and that the diamond lead is protected (after the transfer) you come to the slam conclusion.

Board #40. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer West, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Fantoni-Nunes (NS for Italy) vs. Meckstroth-Rodwell (EW for USA 1).

♠ A ♥ K J1097 ♦ A 8 2 ♣ 10 9 8 5	♠ K 7 6 3 ♥ A ♦ K J 10 5 ♣ A Q J 2	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	**-**	**1♥**	**Pass**
			2♣	**Pass**	**3♣**	**Pass**
			4♠	**Pass**	**5♦**	**Pass**
			6♣	**All Pass**		

At the other table the Italians played 3 NT. Another 10 IMPs for USA1. So let's count.

West has 12+5+9+4 = 30 Zar Points – at the border of having 1 Level "reserve".

East has 18+6+8+3 = 35 Zar Points – before any upgrades for trumps and the double-fit in diamonds.

Note again, that EW have 11 of the 12 controls here and total control in 3 of the 4 suits. Even if you don't count Zar Points at all, keep in mind that a hand rich in controls is worth more than it looks like in "prima vista".

Board #41. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer North, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Bocchi-Duboin (EW for Italy) vs. Hamman-Soloway (NS for USA 1).

♠ A J 2 ♥ 10 6 ♦ A Q J32 ♣ Q 10 3	♠ K Q9 853 ♥ A Q 9754 ♦ 9 ♣ ___	**Bidding:**	**East**	**South**	**West**	**North**
			-	-	-	**Pass**
			1♠	**Pass**	**2♣**	**Pass**
			2♥	**Pass**	**2♠**	**Pass**
			3♦	**Pass**	**3♥**	**Pass**
			3♠	**Pass**	**4♦**	**Pass**
			4♥	**Pass**	**4♠**	**Pass**
			5♣	**Pass**	**5♦**	**Dbl**
			Pass	**Pass**	**Rdbl**	**Pass**
			5♥	**Pass**	**6♠**	**Dbl**
			Rdbl	**All Pass**		

Wow … quite a bidding here. At the other table Meckstroth didn't move off the **4♠** contract at all. So let's count, as usual.

East has a monster-hand with only 11 HCP but 11+3+12+6 = 32 Zar Points! Plus the 3 for the extra trump with a side void for **a total of 35.**

West has 13+4+8+3 = 28 Zar Points, plus 2 for the honors in spades **for a total of 30.**

Even if you discount for duplication, the amount ensures the slam exploration which the Italians did very carefully. And it was almost there – besides the fact that everything was "bad", including the 4:0 trumps in the "unexpected" hand (not the one that doubled).

Tough game - but as friend of mine usually notes after he doubles a contract, "If it was an easy one, I wouldn't' have doubled" :-)

May be it is worth have a look at North's hand. He holds:

♠void; ♥ 83; ♦ K 8 7 5 4; ♣ A J 8 7 4 2

and as you can guess, on a ♣ contract they collect 11 tricks here, losing 1 trick in each red suit. However, neither Lauria-Versace nor Hamman-Soloway made a move that might have ended with a clubs contract doubled at some level. So let's count North's hands – just for hack of it.

North has 8+3+11+6 = **28 Zar Points!** Moreover, that's **before any upgrades!**

And **11 tricks in clubs** despite the **3:0 trumps** and **5:1 diamonds** (the singleton diamond has no trumps to ruff the second round :-).

Hey, may be it is worth at least considering Zar Points :-)

Bermuda Bowl 2003 –Day 13, November 15

Final Day, Day # 13 …

Board #42. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Dealer North, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Lauria-Versace (NS for Italy) vs. Hamman-Soloway (EW for USA 1).

♠ 9 6 ♥ KQ10 96 ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ 10 6	♠ A K 5 2 ♥ A J 8 7 3 ♦ A J 6 ♣ K	**Bidding:**	**East** - **1♣** **3♥** **4♦**	**South** - **Pass** **Pass** **Pass**	**West** - **2♥** **2♠** **4♥**	**North** **Pass** **Pass** **Pass** **All Pass**

A laydown slam, played at the other table. Let's count, as usual.

East has 20+8+9+4 = 41 Zar Points.

West has 10+2+9+3 = 24 Zar Points before any upgrades – that's above slam level already. And you can count the upgrades already. Note, that it is hard fro Hamman (West) to continue after the **4♥** because East is the one with the control in clubs …

Board #43. Final USA 1 vs. Italy

Final board of the Final.

It was a dramatic match already – may be the most dramatic in the history of Bermuda Bowl, according to the commentators … But the last board made it even more so…

Dealer North, NS VUL. We will present the bidding at the table of Lauria-Versace (NS for Italy) vs. Hamman-Soloway (EW for USA 1).

♠ J 10 ♥ 5 4 3 ♦ A 7 ♣ K 10 7 6 4 2	♠ A 6 5 4 3 ♥ K Q 10 8 6 ♦ 4 2 ♣ A	**Bidding:** **1♦**	**East** - **2♦** **Pass** **Dbl**	**South** - **Dbl** **Pass** **All Pass**	**West** - **2♥** **3♥**	**North** **3♦** **5♦**

It was really hard for me to decide which pair of hands to present here – it is a drama not so much from technical point of view, but rather coming from all the exhaustion and nervousness associated with the last board of the last segment of the last match … So as an exception, let's have a look at the other 2 hands, too:

North	South	Bidding:	East	South	West	North
♠ 2 ♥ A J 9 3 ♦ K Q 10 9 8 6 5 ♣ 5	♠ K Q 9 8 7 ♥ 7 ♦ J 3 ♣ Q J 9 8 3					

Both North players (Lauria here and Rodwell "there") opened this 10 HCP hand and Level 1 (**1**♦), so let's have a look at the Zar Points in this hand: 10+3+11+6 = 30 Zar Points!

South has 9+1+10+4 = 24 Zar Points, but **not a direct fit** for his partner's suits! Note also, that NS are missing 8 of the 12 controls – **only 1/3 of the controls are in their hands**, a good indicator for troubles at the higher levels.

The drama actually started at the other table (finished much earlier) where Bocchi went down 4 vulnerable for -400 in a board which is in the part-score-fight range … Here Lauria jumped to 5♦ pretty much "by himself" and the salt of all this is that if he goes down 1 rather than down 2, the match score goes to 303 : 303, meaning another 8 boards were due to be played in order to decide the World Championship Crown.

And Soloway gave Lauria this last chance – thinking that his partner is singleton in spades, he took the K of spades played from dummy and returned a spade for his partner to ruff (no trumps were touched at this moment). And now … Lauria played small from dummy, thinking that Soloway will draw his heart winner. He called for the Q after that, but the director and later the appeal committee decided that Q cannot be played since the initial call was made … A sad finish of a really dramatic and wonderful match throughout …

This ends up the 2003 Bermuda Bowl Tournament.

The new **world champion is USA 1 with a 304-303 win!** Congratulations to Meckstroth-Rodwell, Hamman-Soloway, Nickell-Freeman, and last but not least, to their coach, the Canadian grand-master Eric Kokish! Bravo Eric!

Cheers:

ZAR

Contact: zpetkov@aci.on.ca

Part Five

Critics and Opinions

Critics and Opinions regarding the Zar Points

This page provides some "bits and pieces" of my precious discussions with many world champions, famous bridge authors, and world-class players. At the bottom of the page you will see comments from the editors of different bridge magazines, too.

The reason I provide this is that I believe it gives you the important perspective (not always favorable for me) of undisputed experts – it would benefit you regardless of your attitude towards Zar Points.

Matt Granovetter:

>

The idea of such an article is terrific.

<

Thanx, Matt.

>

Your system most probably is an improvement over current point count evaluation, but...it's too complicated for most players….

<

This statement is kind-of a "common" concern, and honestly my "unbiased" opinion is that there isn't such a "giant leap of a difference" in complexity between:

- calculating 3*v + 2*s + d (where v is the number of voids, s is the number of singletons, and d is the number of doubletons in the hand);

- calculating (a+b) + (a-d) where a, b, c, and d are the suit-lengths in descending order;

Habit, familiarity and convenience are probably some of the factors here, but certainly the "perception" of complexity that you point out is there to some extend.

And "perception is reality" ✍ Thanx, Matt.

Eddie Kantar:

>

Although it looks good and I agree with almost every bid, I doubt whether you can sell it to the general public because it's a bit too involved - too many calculations.

<

You always have to have your calculator handy in bridge, Eddie ✍ I definitely recognize your concern regarding the general public, though.

Good luck with your new book!

Larry Cohen:

>

Looks interesting -- several authors (Marty Bergen, Edgar Kaplan and others) have gotten interested in the subject and have tried to develop alternate point count systems. Of course, this debate goes back to the Goren-Culberson-Lenz days.

I would have to study more seriously to fully understand -- it is more than casual reading! Thanks for the mention of the LAW with reference to me.

<

My pleasure, Larry - it's just natural to direct the reader to your publications when the LAW is the subject.

>I'll forward it to Marty -- but I know he gets overwhelmed with e-mails and can't respond to them right away.

<

Thanx in advance – I am really looking forward to his comments and critics.

Fred Gitelman:

>

Very interesting and well written article.

<

Thanx, Fred.

> I suspect that Eric Kokish will also enjoy reading it. His e-mail address is ….

<

Thanx for the referral. I'll get in contact with him today.

>

I wish I could give you some more intelligent feedback about your ideas, but I am afraid the only way to do that would be for me to try playing bridge using your methods of hand evaluation and see how it works. Given my current schedule, this is unlikely to be possible any time soon.

<

Believe me, Fred – I didn't expect you to throw everything away and start playing Zar Points in the middle of a tournament✍)

>

My general sense after reading your article is that your ideas do have merit. Perhaps if I spend some time with the program you plan to create will be sufficient for me to gain better insight into how well Zar points work in practice.

<

I hope so – and I'll keep you posted. Good luck with the up-coming tournaments!

Michael Rosenberg:

>

I examined the article. I have seen similar attempts to quantify hand evaluation before, and the problem is that things are always missed. For example, I saw no mention of singleton honors or intermediate cards.

<

Singleton honors are degraded the same way they are degraded now, Mike. Also, all favorite conventions are available, too (adjusted to the Zars).

Intermediate cards - they are accounted for - 10's of fit-suits are counted as 1 pt, while 10's in the short suits are worthless anyway.

(NOTE: these comments were about the first version of the article where I really have missed to explicitly mention the regular degrading for singleton honors, so Mike had his point, as usual).

>

Perhaps Zar Points would be useful for some players, but for most experts I think the current system, intelligently adjusted, works ok.

<

Agree 100%.

This article certainly does NOT target the experts, though. On the contrary - it targets the intermediate and "advanced" players that do NOT have yours and Zia's expertise!

That's the whole point - how to try to bridge the gap between the expert and the middle guy. I don't think you or Bob Hamman or Zia would EVER need the Zar Points.

Please ... :-)

>

I actually think too many players are 'slave' to the 4-3-2-1 system. I guess being a slave to the Zar Points system would be as big a problem, just as some players now are slave to the Law of total Tricks.

<

Nothing can replace thinking at the table, Mike - you know that far, far better than me. The point is to provide "somewhat-better" guidelines for the "middle-guy" who constantly operates in a fog of uncertainty.

>

A comprehensive system (like this) is too complicated for at-the-table use. I see no real 'solution' (to being an expert), except learning from reading and experience.

<

Well… that's certainly so … Reading and experience – and learning from it rather than just reading it and experiencing it ✍ Agree again, Mike. Thank you for both the time and the comments!

Mike Lawrence:

>

Your article is interesting, to say the least...

<

Thanx indeed, Mike …

>

I do have some brief thoughts however.

The items you isolate to use in your evaluation are all worthwhile.

I have not bothered to check to see if they are properly weighted, but each contributes some important point.

<

I discussed that with Fred Gitelman, already (the proper weight). The proper weights are a matter of equations calculations already so this cannot be a concern (NOTE: this was again an early feedback like the one from Michael Rosenberg so these were all valid points as you might expect).

>

There is one point that bothers me in that there is no allowance for judgment. It looked to me as if misfitting hands might overreach to game when they should not.

When there is no fit, you need extra values to compensate.

<

Agree 100%, but I discuss these in the second version of the article (the one on the Web) and you'll see the developments there – thanx once again for the example and the rest of the feedback!

>

The correction …

<

I thought a lot about that, and the trouble stems from the need that the correction should be simple enough to be no burden for the players and in the same time to be effective in the sense that in covers the suit combination in both hands.

The power of Zar Points is engendered by its simplicity (oh, man … I meant 'compexity'✍) and relative independence of the hand evaluation (only fit adjustments are made). But I will certainly continue thinking in that direction, Mike.

>

Sorry if I seem to be quibbling a little...

<

VERY strong points, actually (as one might expect from Mike Lawrence ✍)! Thank you indeed for the time to read the article and think about counter examples!

>

Anyway, your statement about bidding aggressive games is correct and anything to encourage that is useful.

<

That's the main point indeed.

Most of the critics I received on the article boil down to the "it is too complex" issue – it looks like counting to 13 is already too complex ✍.

We have to certainly keep the things as simple as possible, though (but not simpler ✍). Thanx again, Mike!

Eric Kokish:

>

I've read the article quite carefully …

<

Thank you, Eric!

>

I think you're on to something, although the world will consider it too complex.

<

By sitting around the bridge table, you already are into something "too complex", Eric ✍

>

The key to everything is the two short suits and it impacts on so much of the total count, as in 4-0 vs 2-2, for example.

<

Very true.

>

I believe that this stuff is worth publishing.

<

Honored to hear it from your mouth, Eric – I've read so many articles of yours…

>

Start by trying The Bridge World and Bridge Today, but don't rule out any publication. IMP magazine in Holland is a likely candidate too.

<

Thank you again. I definitely will.

>

Keep me up to date.

<

Most certainly will. Thanx!

Ron Klinger:

>

Thank you for forwarding the article to me.

Fascinating reading and excellent content.

Well done.

<

Thank you, Ron. I am honored to hear that from you!

Indeed.

>

There will be many (the ambitious) who will be influenced by your approach, but the vast majority will fall into your final four paras group. Everything beyond 4-3-2-1 is too complex.

<

Oh, man … same refrain ✍

4-3-2-1 – let's play bridge for fun ✍

>

I have recently tried to encourage the average players to 'lower their standards' by taking shape and controls into account when opening the bidding --- attached are excerpts from

a couple of recent books --- and focusing on many of the factors that you do, too, but Zar Points are much more scientific and hence thorough.

Congratulations.

<

Thank you, Ron!

And good luck to the up-coming Bermuda Bowl – I'll comment on some of the boards there from Zar Points perspective.

Thanx again and good luck!

Sid Ismail:

>

Hi, Zar!

I have distributed your link to some 300 players on the SABF mailing list.

<

Thank you, Sid !

>

A view expressed by an ex-Norwegian master is attached.

<

Thanx, again – I'll gave a look and reply promptly.

Paul Ibona.

>

I have engineering and mathematical academic background and I must say that your point count is very, very clever.

I am very excited to try it at the table.

<

Thanx Paul – at the table is all that counts ✍

>

Good to see some theoretical work done and see how it works in practice.

Many thanks again for this groundbreaking point count.

<

Please let me know if you hit a measurable success or failure with Zar Points – I'd be pleased to explore both.

Rose Duff:

>

Hi there Zar,

Many thanks for all the amazing research you've been doing!

We all benefit from it.

<

Thank you – I certainly hope so ✍

>

Am I right to assume that one partner alone can't use your Zar point count if her partner is using the old faithful Goren or Bergen counts?

<

Very good question, actually.

And the answer is "yes, you can". In fact Zar Points are going to be used in the up-coming Bermuda Bowl (by a very few teams of course) and one of the players is going to use it EXACTLY that way – just to "back" his decision-making process in tho ugh situations.

Kit Woolsey:

>

Looks fine to me, Zar.

<

Thanx, Kit – good luck at both the bridge table and the backgammon board ✍

Butch Campbell:

>

Your example of opening with 7 HCP's is not permitted in ACBL sanctioned events.

<

Butch, since you are the ACBL Tournament Division Manager, you can take the appropriate steps to change that :-)

I am sure you do realise that if you do not open the hand, you'll be "out of breath" real soon. This is on top of the fact that by opening you are pushing the opponents in defensive track.

Points-schmoints ... you either play bridge or cricket :-)

>
A change to this would require approval of the ACBL Board of Directors. I do not intend to propose such a change.
<

The point is that when I pick up my cards, the last thing I need is a Tournament Director reaching and grabbing my jaw like the Big Brother, whispering in my ear "Now you have to say P-A-S-S, boy..." (did I scare you? :-)

Forgive my arrogance of thinking that I have a couple of brain cells in my head and I can decide whether to say "Pass", "One Spade", or "Boy, oh, boy" :-)

You don't like my bidding 'extravagances'? I have an easy solution for you - just pull the "X", enjoy the result, and say "Thank you" :-)

This kind of a game is called "Bridge".

If you continue the line of ever-increasing restrictions, we'll end-up with rules like:

- third-hand MUST play high;

- second-hand MUST play low;

- you MUST take all finesses (in the trump suit only : -) etc.

I am not saying that such a game is not gonna be interesting - all I am saying is that it's gonna be interesting in a "different way" :-)

Thanx for the input, needless to say.

Mario Dix:

>
I must say it is a very fascinating article and I shall give it some local publicity in a review here in Malta.
<

Thank you in advance, Mario!

>
I get a headache thinking about all your stuff , but truly, thanks a lot.
<

Sounds better than I have expected, Mario :-)

Ken Lindsay:

>
Aloha, Zar!
<

Aloha, Ken !

>
I finished reading all 26 pages of your document, and was VERY impressed.
<

Thank you, nice to hear it from you.

>
I'll send a longer reply in a few days -- this looks to be a busy week -- and look forward to seeing you next summer (unless you can be persuaded to come in January for our annual Regional, instead).
<

I'd love to, but the current plans are to be in Japan by that time - I'll let you know.

>
Cordially, Ken
<

Thanx again - I am looking forward to your further comments

.....

>
First off, I really meant it when I said I was VERY impressed with what you're doing.
<

I am really honored Ken, indeed.

>
There's a long history of attempts to improve on Culbertson's honor count approach, but nothing has been able to displace the Work count, at least in this country. The idea that adding controls to Work is equivalent to the 6421 count seems obvious (NOW), but I'd never made that connection. And the (a+b) + (a-d) was totally new to me, and an obvious improvement on Bergen's Rule of 20. You're the king (or perhaps the (C)Zar) of hand evaluation.
<

Wow ... that certainly goes beyond my expectations Ken. Nobody has gone that far so far :-)

All this stuff has been there since the time Mr. Harold Vanderbuilt invented the contemporary Contract Bridge - I was just able to see it and happy to report it.

To put it using the famous sentence of Federico Fellini - "I just report what I see" :-)

>
I dabbled in point counts briefly years ago, but quit when no one seems to want to change from Work, and my main interest was in system development rather than hand evaluation.

A bit of history. I joined the ACBL in 1950 while in graduate school, as soon as I had passed my prelims, and was immediately impressed by S J Simon (not so much by "Why You Lose at Bridge" as by his other book, "Design for Bidding", that talked about the tradeoffs involved in building a system. That inspired me to send an article to The Bridge World on an Americanized version of Acol that, to my surprise, was published as a 3-part series in 1957 when I'm sure I had less than 100 MPs. I quickly decided I needed to learn the game before writing anything else, and finally wrote "3-D and the MAFIA Club" in 1981 that combined a forcing club/4-card major system with some new ideas on competitive bidding, and had favorable reviews in England and Australia, but only lukewarm reviews here (because every bid would be an alert). Then I retired, moved here, and did not play for a few years while developing an automated publishing system for the Navy. Then my daughter decided to join me and wanted to learn bridge. That led to "Foundations of Modern American Bidding" that tries to make what people play today at least semi-intelligible.
<

I visited the http://northshorebridge.com/foundn.htm site specifically for that, Ken. Trully impressive from a variety of perspectives ... I am going through it chapter-by-chapter ...

>
My main quarrel with American bidding is the emphasis on 44-fits, since that often makes it more difficult to locate the 53-fits (primary as well as secondary) that provide a source of tricks for games and slams. So my systems usually have a minimum biddable suit quality of Q10xx, and I'll freely bid AKx (or even KJ10 or Axx, in a pinch) before stooping to 8762, on the theory that most defensive tricks are taken by high cards (or ruffs) rather than by length, and if we don't have the high cards, then the opponents must.

The net result of such thinking is that I try to evaluate high-card strength and distributional strength separately, with controls determining which of the two is more important. This is why I've been using, and teaching the Losing Trick Count for measuring distributional strength. You (surprisingly) didn't treat LTC in your comparisons, but with 9 possible scores (0-8), it should rate as well as the best of the non-Zar methods.
<

I've been around Romex since my student years in the late 70-es and I would say that LTC doesn't directly address the distribution (or shape) per se. What I have in mind is the following (examples directly taken from the LTC page of bridge-forum.com):

8764	3 Losers	A64	2 Losers
1096532	3 Losers	A6432	2 Losers
KQ54	1 Loser	KQ865	1 Loser
AK98	1 Loser	A9	1 Loser

I am sure you see the problems I have with LTC (actually the 2 TYPES of problems I have).

I have hard time classifying these points as Distribution Count ... They are more relevant to the Footprints, if considered in both hands, although the Footprints cover much more ground I believe.

>
I'm beginning to suspect that HCP is the least important of the components in the Zar count, and that a workable system might be possible with just Controls + (a+b) + (a-d), which I'll call the Zar Distributional Count (ZD).
<

You are right about the HCP. Its value is pushed back in two ways:

1) The amount of points you get from distribution is BIG compared to the amount of points you "collect" from the HCP (say, a hand with 11 HCP and 5431 distribution will get 13 points for the distribution - more than the HCP itself);

2) You add the Controls, which pushes the value of the HCP even further (say, in the above-mentioned 11-HCP hand you'd get additional 5 points if the 11 HCP are A-A-K).

>
This might be a good approach for preemptive bidding. I've never believed in prohibiting a Weak Two Bid with a side 4-card suit, and this approach could legitimize my violations of that prohibition. Since 26/13 = 2 (My, I'm brilliant today!) it might make sense to divide ZD by 2 and add it to HCP to get ZarCount/2 and thus retain the familiar 13 to open/26 for game. Then people could use ZC/2 for opening bids and ZD/2 for Weak Twos and preempts.
<

I will study the idea of "Zar-Pointing" the pre-emptive bids - it's certainly worth it, thank you Ken.

As to the general conversion (scaling back to 13 for opening by dividing the amout of Zar Points by two), I did a similar thing for scaling Zar Points (the distributive part of it, or the ZD-points as you call them) to Goren points and then to Bergen points - this was an idea of Jeff Rubens, the Editor of "The Brige World", which I liked a lot.

This scaling is in "The Conversion" section.

But I'll definitely do the research of evaluating the preempts in Zar Points - an excellent idea! Thanx Ken! I'll keep you informed about the developments.

Nikos Sarantakos:

>
Thank you for the link - I want to study it more deeply. After a first cursory glance I liked what I saw, especially the fact that you use real-life deals played by experts.
<

Thanx, Nikos.

>
I also am looking forward to see your analysis of the coming Bermuda Bowl.
<

Thank you - it's the same idea - see what the experts do and how you would compare ...

>
A hint: if you have the time and inclination, you may want to check the Monte Carlo deals for:

- hands that were not opened by champions although they were a Zar opening bid

- hands that were opened light although Zar would not open them
<

The latter would REALLY surprise me - if I see one I will DEFINITLY publish it under the Bermuda Bowl link. Even the idea to check for that did never occur to me ...

If ANY expert EVER opens a hand that does NOT have 26 Zar Points, this would be an indication that the expert is drunk :-) The other case around - failure to open a hand that does have 26 Zar Points would be an indication that the expert is asleep :-)

Seriously, I challenge you to present me a hand opened by an expert which does not have 26 Zar Points. I believe this as strong as I believe that I am writing these phrases in this moment.

But hey, experts live in their own world :-) I'll be watching and please, so do you. Thanx a lot!

Bob Crosby:

>
With the benefit of hindsight and standing on the shoulders of Milton Work, Charles Goren and Marty Bergen, I would approach evaluating hands differently. Milton points only work well in NT contracts.
<

Agree 100% - there is a section that acknowledges that, actually - the one that considers the 1NT opening with two different response-hands.

Another note - I have the same benefit of standing on the shoulders of Milton, Goren, and Bergen myself. I acknowledge and respect that wholeheartedly. There would have been no progress if we don't step on the shoulders of one another and reach higher ...

>
The Goren distributional points only emphasize shortness and do not take into consideration suit lengths .
<

Goren does not reflect suit lengths DIRECTLY, but he DOES do so indirectly, whether he intended that or not. I believe I gave a good example with the 5-5 two-suiter. In Goren you get 3 points for that 5-5 lengths (either 2+1 for a singleton and doubleton or direct 3 points for a void).

>
The Bergen method only emphasizes adding your two longest suits and other adjustments.
<

True. But then again - one can argue that Bergen gives 10 points for a void or a combination of a singleton and doubleton in the above-mentioned hand :-) All these correlations stem from the fact that all the four lengths are "squeezed" in a sum of 13.

>
Your article hits the nail on the head with the emphasis on the 39 hand patterns. This should be the focal point of hand evaluation. The 39 hand patterns should be mapped into some quantitative structure .
<

That's essentially what Zar Points (and Goren, Bergen and the rest for that matter) are trying to do, indeed.

>
A 4-3-3-3 pattern should have a value of one , a 4-4-3-2 a value of 2 , a 4-4-4-1 a value of 3 , a 5-3-3-2 a value of 4 etc up to your 13-0-0-0 pattern which has a value of infinity if in

spades.
<

Wow ... I don't know about the value of infinity, but you are suggesting a VALUABLE new idea here - the idea to COMBINE the lengths and the suits they are actually in!!! In other words, a length of 6 to yield different points if in CLUBS or SPADES! That's worth exploring, Bob - and I believe I'd do that! I actually "hint" such an approach when adding 1 point for holding the Spade suit. I'll explore this "cute" idea further ...

As for the values you suggest assigning (1, 2, 3 etc...), John McLeod, the "Guru of all Card Games" as I call him (and the guy who runs www.pegat.com - check it out) suggested an even more natural metrics for the sake of a different argument we had - simply regard the distributions as 4-digit decimal numbers. That is, the distribution 5-3-3-2 has the value of 5 thousand, 3 hundred, and 32, the 4-3-3-3 distribution has a value of 4 thousand, 3 hundred, and 33 etc. (John is the most knowledgeable card-games guy I have ever seen, indeed).

The real question is - what do you actually do with these assigned numbers? Just watch them wandering how big or how small they are? :-) I am sure you see the point.

>
This is what you are attempting to do with your length subtractions and additions.
<
You are not hinting that I am doing something "complex", are you? :-) Please, have mercy :-)
>
However, a better approach (if it is possible) ...
<
Let me tell you right away - it's impossible :-)
>
... would be to quantify the hand patterns and then make adjustments for HCP's and controls.
<
I am a bit lost here ... forgive me ... I believe that's what Zar Points actually do.

>
Hand Patterns are bridge . We defend and count using hand patterns. In declarer play we visualize the lie of the land with hand patterns and plan our play accordingly. Squeezes and endplays are executed with the benefit of hand patterns. We translate bidding into hand patterns to visualize what partner is trying to communicate to us by bidding . If it were back to the 1920's or 1930's and I was trying to invent or quantify a method to evaluate bridge hands, I would use hand patterns as the starting point. 7-3-2-1 , 6-5-1-1 , 5-5-3-0 make HCP's almost irrelevant .
<

That's actually the benefit of using Zar Points indeed. The above-mentioned hands get 2 TIMES more points than the 4-3-3-3 distribution gets, effectively pushing the HCP "portion" of Zar Points back.

>
Teaching the average player to "think in patterns" is a monumental step in their bridge development.

Again , well done in your article .
<

Thanx Bob - I'll let you know how the working of the "length-suit" combo shapes out. Thanx.

Venkat Er:

>
Very Interesting article on hand evaluation.
<

Thanx, Venkat.
>
Couple of quick questions:

a) Most of the examples you have given are for suit contracts. Does the Zar Point Count with continuous re-evaluation work equally well for NT contracts?
<

There is a comment on NT contracts immediately after the section SUMMARY for the distributive hands (in red). BUT - the short answer is - with balanced hands or on your way to a NT contract, you re-work to regular "brute HCP power" the way you usually do.

To make the point clearer - if you have a 4-3-3-3 distribution, you shouldn't even bother calculating Zar Points - just see where the brute HCP power is and act accordingly.

If the regular sequence in the field for a board is 1NT - 3NT, Zar Points are not going to help you much. Neither would Goren or Bergen, for that matter.

>
b) How well does pre-emption work with ZAR evaluation?
<

As with any other system, indeed. Neither better, nor worse ... I love pre-emption (when I do it :-).

>
Continue the good work.
<

Thanx, Venkat - let me know if you hit an interesting board, be it positive or negative.

Roger Eymard:

>
Thank you very much for your article on Zar Points.

<

My pleasure, Roger.

>

It looks as a great effort to improve and complete the initial work by Jean-René Vernes, published in 1966 (Emile-Paul editor, Paris), and in which has been firstly demonstrated the Law of Total Tricks, by an approach similar to yours (solving a number of equations to determine the values of a lot of parameters).
<

I have never heard of the gentleman ... I DO remember that we were using The Law back in the 70-es in Bulgaria in the university bridge club, but even back then I didn't know who The Law of Total Tricks was "invented" by ...

Now that you told me that, I made a search on the Web and I was surprised to read an interview, in which he talks about that and the fact that he had discovered it back in 1955 and started discussing it in 1958 ... interesting ... Here is a "cut" of it:

"J'ai découvert la loi des levées totales vers 1955. J'ai commencé à en parler, à partir de 1958, dans une série d'articles, et je l'ai publiée sous sa forme actuelle en 1966 dans " Bridge moderne de la défense " .

I'll read the entire interview, thanx a lot !

>
That's why I would greatly appreciate if you could tell me what were the parameters you introduced in your equations :
- values to be assigned to the different honors?

- values to be assigned to the four suits lenghts?
- values to be assigned to the six possible length differences?
- other variables and parameters?

Thank you in advance
<

Actually The Theorem and the implication on The Law:

- if the opponents have a superfit, YOU have at least 3 8-card fits yourself

- if the opponents have a double superfit, YOU have a double superfit yourself

and the "easy" form of it, grasped by the principle "The more they have, the more we have", have been "manually" proved via the Dirichlet Principle in math.

The Zar Points themselves (the DISTRIBUTIVE part of it) were an independent "discovery" which initially had the form of (a + b) + (c -d) and was targeting the difference in playing power with 5-4 two-suiter between

- 5-4-2-2

- 5-4-3-1

- 5-4-4-0

The comments of Eric Kokish for example are regarding this first light version where the current Zar Points were called "Recursive Zar Points" and were presented as an improvement over my initial count of (a + b) + (c - d). After I ran a number of boards (equations) through them, the first version was dropped since it was of the SAME complexity as the first one, and (more importantly) it fit the 6-4-2-1 HCP count (Milton + Controls) closer. The equations themselves DID already include the distribution part of Zar Points in the form (a + b) + (a - d) and involved the coefficients for Honors, Discount honor combinations, Upgrades for 2-suit-concentration of Honors, and the adjustments for additional length (over 8) and honors in the partner suits.

The Controls were "separated" later from the 6-4-2-1 count for easier-to-remember purposes (i.e. to preserve the Milton HCP 4-3-2-1 count which people are accustomed to). The inclusion of the Distributive points solved a lot of problems with length calculations and adjustments and the way you combine these lengths and differences in lengths. There were other experiments which "didn't make the grade" - plus the coeficients were rounded and the equations re-run for regression testing, of course.

The final version is the one you know. Note also, that virtually all the boards were either game in major or small slam with virtually no duplication, since this was the initial tagret I had in mind. The yielded values for the levels were about 52 and 62 respectively for

game in major and slam, again - in the "no fat" or "no duplication" cases (the corresponding values for the (c-d) version were 48 and 58 and the openning level was 24). That's the story.

Thanx again for the pointer to the work of Mr. Jean-René Vernes on The Law ! And the attention to The Theorem and its implications on The Law - I was surprised that the entire attention was focused on the Opening and the Upgrade of the hands towards a Game and you are the FIRST one to even mention The Theorem and implications on The Law.

Thanx!

Vil Gravis:

>

Hello, Mr. Zar!

Congratuations on a brilliant piece of work.
<

Thank you - brilliant is a bit of a "stretch" I guess, though :-)

>
I write a small bridge magazine and do some teaching. Recently I wrote an article relating to a bidding problem that involved a 'very' light opening bid. I got thoroughly rubbished by most of the so called 'experts' on a panel. Would you like me to send you a copy of the article and some of the panel's comments - maybe you could comment on what I wrote.
<

Most certainly, Vil - I'd be glad to.

>
Also, if I do any bidding problems in future, would you be on the 'panel' and maybe you may also be interested in contributing to the magazine by way of any articles etc? Hoping to hear from you,
<

I'd be happy to. Keep in mind that experts do not need people to teach them - that's why they are experts :-) Don't get offended by that - some times (I'd sasy MOST of the time) they simply don't have .... TIME to deal with stuff they don't need in the first place. Just take it easy and keep going ...

Stig Holmquist:

>

Hi Zar,

Is it a coinsidence that your 6-4-2-1 scale is just twice the old 4A's scale of 3-2-1-0.5? In case you are not aware of it , this scale was discussed in Bridge World by M.Schwartz in the Dec.2000 issue on p.4-8.Also, if you multiply the 4A's scale by 1.5 you get the Martelli scale.
<

It's just a matter of coeficients solutions actually. The fact that 6-4-2-1 fits perfectly the "natural" for most readers "counting" of HCP + Controls was the "lucky" fact in this case.

You can scale it up or down the way it fits you needs (meaning your OTHER considerations in the process of Hand Evaluation, whatever that might be).

I have NOT "inveted" any of these, as you know :-)

>
Perhaps you are not aware that an eleven card suit missing A+K counts as 23.5 Zar pts but it is likely to take 10 tricks.
<

So you think that the hand xx, QJxxxxxxxxx, -, - havs 23.5 Zar Points ... Let's check that ... You have 3 HCP and 0 controls for a total of 3 pt on the Honors side.

On the distribution side you have 11+2 + 11-0 = 24 points.

On the trump length upgrade (3 points for any trump FIT over 8) you get an average 12 additional points (since you fir is between 11 and 13 cards) for another 12 pt.

So 3 + 24 + 12 = 39 Zar Points.

The actual 39 is different from 23.5 but the point is elsewhere.

>
Such a hand would qualify for a strong 2C opening bid under ACBL rules proving the card shows 9+ tricks regardless of HCP count.
<

You probably have not read the "Critics Section" ....

Read the emails from Butch (the ACBL Tournament Division Manager - he specifically COMPLAINS about me giving examples with openings of hands which have BELOW 8 (EIGTH) HCP, since that is AGAINST the ACBL rules.

I have a friend who sais that he will be comfortable if the "formuilae" shows Level 6 when you hold 12 Spades to the A and singleton aside :-)

Now, with 12 spades to the A you can count on 12 tricks :-) Such a hand would collect basically 4 more poins in HCP and 3 more in controls, for a total of 46 Zar Points which still doesn't reflect the fact that you have cold 12 tricks.

Can you make the Evaluation System SOLVE that - sure - you can just change the values assigned to additional trumps (abovr an 8-card fit) accordingly (say, instead of assigning 3 points for ANY additional, trump, you will start assigning 4 for the 10th, 5 for the 11th etc.). Is it WORTH it is the question.

Is it WORTH it to clutter the counting system with all kinds of artificial "additions" and "subtractions" for the sake of "covering it all", or ist better to take my approach, which is "keep it simple and instruct the guy to use his head".

You can find the answer for yourself.

>
In the first version of Zar Points - (a+b) + (c-d), the objection was that the difference between 5422 and 5431 was 2 points, which is equal to a Q. But since your point total is twice that of a standard counting, if follows that 2 pts for the 3-1 short is equal to 1 pt, not a Q.
<

Not really. As we mentioned, the first version of Zar Points was calculating (a+b) + (c-d) and the current ZAR Points (a+b) + (a-d) were presented as an improvement (at that time they were called "Recursive Zar Points").

Now, what happens in the previous version is the following:

If I change your distribution from 5422 to 5431 I'll get 2 more points, right? If I add one more Q to your hand I'll get AGAIN 2 more points, which was too much for the experts.

Now, note, that with the Recursive Zar Points (the current Zar Points that is) you get ONLY ONE point for getting from 5422 to 5431 -> from 12 to 13 Zar Points.

Geoffrey Bramhall:

>

Dear Mr. Petkov,

I look forward to trying out your system. I feel like a pioneer!
<

He-he ... nice feeling, right? :-)

>
How long has it been in use? There is certainly a lot of inertia to overcome.
<

"Inertia" is a very good way to put it, actually Geoffrey. People just keep looking forward to the next board, as if it will change things by itself :-)

>
I forwarded your article to a bridge pal of mine after trying to give him my take on it verbally.
<

Thank you - "word of mouth" is the best way to go ahead ...

>
ACBL might be willing to use your article in the "Bulletin" and perhaps you could be a guest columnist defending challenges to it or answering the inevitable questions.
<

The editor of "The Bridge Buletin" is in communication with me, indeed.

>
But perhaps you're not interested in adding any more to your plate which must be quite full already!
<

It is - but I enjoy communicating with people. Different people have different take on things and make you think in directions you would never consider heading to ...

>
Good luck and I'll be watching for your name in the bridge news.
<

Thanx :-)

Magazines

Jeff Rubens, “The Bridge World” editor :

>

Some simplifications can be made (on the technical side). Assuming that "controls" means high-card controls, what we now call 2-1-points in The Bridge World (it is hard to say as no example has a singleton), you are adding two for an ace and one for a king,

<

Yes. The other controls (singletons and voids) are "implicitly covered" by the S2 - the sum of all the 3 differences in suit lengths – Zar Points do not attach explicit points for distributional controls.

>

in which case you are in effect using 6-4-2-1 points, which we have discussed at some length in fairly recent issues. Because you are adding lengths (points) to 6421 points rather than 4321 points, the lengths count for relatively less.

<

Correct. Note, that you still have 6 points difference from distribution only, though.

The relative balance is a very important point indeed.

>

Over the years, we have considered many proposed such valuation methods. After technical glitches are ironed out, the basic tradeoff seems to be: Is the extra work worth the additional accuracy?

<

This really seams to be the major concern - although I personally do not see the system as something "sophisticated" or "complex" or "too much of an effort".

But definitely the “extra effort”, as you put it, is something all experts mention in one way or another.

The main point “in points” is to quantify judgment, as hard as that might be. And to do so for the so called “intermediate and advanced” players, not for the experts, who will do just fine anyway✍.

The actual reason I started to think about the Zar Points were 2 consecutive boards in which a casual partner in a club raised me from 1 SP to 2 SP with Kxx in spades and 7 HCP.

But, in the first one he had 4333 distribution and 7 pt – a K with 2 Qs, while in the second one he had “similar” 7 pt and Kxx in trumps, but a K and an A plus a void! As you can guess, we went down 1 on the first one and we made +2 on the second one. For him, though, these were just “normal” 1-to-2 raises with Kxx in trumps and 7 pt… or at least his bid showed them “the same”.

The interesting thing is that he DOES realize that the two hands ARE different, but the fact that he knows that doesn’t help him much for 3 reasons:

1) He does not know by HOW MUCH these hands are different.

2) He does not know by how much WHAT (meaning denomination or measure) they are different.

3) He does not know how this knowledge should be reflected in the bidding.

Now he knows that they are different by EIGHT and these EIGHT ARE Zar Points (2 from the controls and 6 from the distribution) and that these 8 points may result in TWO LEVELS difference (depending on re-valuation).

>

Compared with what is currently popular, using Zar points to evaluate distributional strength will lead to more aggressive evaluations with significantly-distributional hands.

<

True.

Goren makes the following distributions EQUIVALENT (all getting 3 points, see the table in the article):

5440

5521

6421

7321

8221

while for the SAME distributions Zar Points vary from 14 to 17.

That's a 4 points diapason for hands considered EQUIVALENT in Goren (with all due respect, needless to say).

If you look at the 2-points range, ALL of the following get 2-points in Goren:

4441

5422

5431

6322

6331

7222

while in Zar Points they range from 11 to 14 - again a 4 points diapason.

>In any case, it seems reasonable to combine 6421 adjusted to the usual scale with Zar shape points adjusted to the usual

scale. This would enable a player who wanted to get better answers in a familiar context to use your results.

<

Thank you very much – I actually did that and you can see it by the end of the article, Jeff. Thank you again – it was your idea to do that and I am grateful for it. It is convincing to show that Zar Points are better than Goren in Goren terms and better than Bergen in Bergen terms :-)

Thanx.

Marek Wójcicki, "Bridge" magazine editor

>

I will translate your article (in Polish) on the new method of hand valuation.

<

Thank you, Marek.

>

The article will be published (in Brydz Magazine) under your name of course.

Kind regards

<

Thank you once again.

I'll let you know if I come up with some modifications.

P.S. The article was published in the August issue of "Bridge", in Polish.

Alex Sukhorukov, "Bridge in Russia" editor.

>

The article looks interesting and if you allow me to printed it in the "Bridge in Russia" magazine, I will translate it in Russian and print it in the first issue of 2004.

<

Thank you, Alex. I would be pleased to see it published in Russia, too. I can help you with the translation – I am Bulgarian Canadian, but I know Russian, too.

>

Thank You in advance!

And best wishes in your theoretical investigations!

<

I'll let you know if I make some modifications (most likely not).

And just a couple of "Regular guys"

It is really nice to hear from the "regular guys" which Zar Points are intended for, as mentioned several times (don't ask Zia if he's playing Zar Points next time around - he'd ask back "**What is 'points'**?"':-).

I get lots of such emails and I'll mention a couple - just for the heck of it :-)

Dimry Gip :

>

Respected Zar,
<

Wow ... what a begining, Dimri :-) Thanx.

>
Good morning to you.

I am very - very thankful to you for this so interesting system.
<

My pleasure, Dimry.

>
Yesterday I won a six-table pair tournament JUST by using the basics of your system, i.e.

HCP+CONTROLS+ (a+b)+(a-d) = 26 in opening hand.
<

This is so nice ... Congratulations!

A six-table local pairs-tournament is a long way from Bermuda Bowl, but it still feels good, right?

So it's not that kind of "hard calculations", I guess ... No rocket science, as long as you have passed grade 1 and know how to count ... :-)

>
I actually passed a few hands ,which I would have opened otherwise.
<

Zar Points work both ways - they make you more CONSERVATIVE with BAD hands and more AGGRESSIVE with GOOD hands. I see that you realise that already.

>
I will request you to send me some more deals played using the Zar Points system.
<

Did you check the link to Bermuda Bowl at the top of the page?

I'll provide "live" reviews in Zar Points from the World Championship EVERY day - so just check the site regularly and you'll have "fresh" and "actually played" deals from "the cream of the experts" :-)

>
It is really a very effective and simple system.
<

I am glad to hear that - good luck using it!

Magnus Skaar :

>

I would like to thank you for a great article and a very interesting theory on hand evaluation.
<

My pleasure, Magnus.

>
The system simplifies calculating points for distribution.
<

I am really glad to hear that - I usually get the opposite responce from the experts - "it's too complex, Zar" ...

>
I'm trying to use zar-points, and so far it looks great !
<

Thanx - and good luck. Let me know if you hit an interesting board, good or bad alike.

>
I have a simple example from a teams match (skipped). The Zar-Count is 27 (12+14+1) so I was happy to open.
<

I am glad to see you considered adding the 1 point for the Spade suit - people often neglect that. HOWEVER, you should not do that here since you have an opening hand anyway - it would have been necessary if you had 25 "regular" Zar Points plus the Spade suit - now you add it and "collect" the 26 necessary for the openng.

>
In the other room this hand was (obviously) not opened with only 10 hcp, and a lay-down game was missed.

<

This kind of AGGRESSIVE game bidding are easy to notice and get excited about because you "feel the joy" on the spot. As you have probably noticed, though, Zar Points work both ways.

The other way is being CONSERVATIVE with BAD hands. Usually the result of this type of boards is "simply a double-score" and people do not pay attention that much, although if you do the math, the gain is comapable with the gain of a non-vulnarable aggresive game.

Cheers

ZAR

Concluding Remarks

I would like to finish these discussions with a quote from Benito Garozzo's Principles (you can find them in fullest on the website):

"The cards don't always play the same way. On offense, a queen is somewhat useless in with two low cards, however it is a certain trick with an ace and king. On defense a suit headed by three major honors might not come to a trick, whereas a hand with a double fit, each to concentrated honors in a long suit, on offense, produce a quantity of tricks absolutely disproportionate in respect to their HCP total. Two mirroring 4333's require a huge number of honors to develop tricks, but the presence of a singleton or void reduces drastically the strength necessary for game or slam in a suit.

The breakdown of high cards and the presence of unusual distributions carry such an importance on the play of the hand, that renders nearly insignificant the use of the law of total tricks. Larry Cohen, in his books, places such and so many conditions for a correct application of his laws, to render obvious how imprecise the Law is in the absence of the distributional information."

The most significant importance of Zar Points is that they provide the best solution known so far to the problems mentioned above. The evidence provided (both in terms of theoretical establishment and mathematical constructions on the one hand, and in practical testing through over a million boards in total on the other hand) consistently prove the stability of performance across the bridge-space levels. The Fit and Superfit Theorems only come as a natural side-effect of developing the Zar Points theory.

I certainly hope that you would decide to try the power of the Zar Points approach at the table and feel the swift difference, just the way all the bridge players that have tried it, have invariably felt.

Good luck!

ZAR