

Very Shapely Hands

Our first introduction to evaluating hands is the system of High Card Points. We learn to add these up every time we get a bridge hand and use these to evaluate our likelihood of making game. We may make some slight adjustments for shortages (once we've found a fit!) and then, if we think our partnership have around twenty five points combined, we will bid game.

The system of High Card Points works very well if both hands are balanced (4333 4432 5332) or semibalanced (5422, 6322 4441 5431). However, the further the hands deviate from these, the less reliable our point count evaluation becomes. Once you start picking up these extremely shapely hands, one must resort more to judgement than algorithm.

The Power of Long Suits

Consider the following 11 High Card Point Hands. They are technically a minimum opening hand:

♠ AKJT9832	♠ 5	♠ A	♠ AK5432
♥ void	♥ AT9876	♥ KQT98532	♥ AT76432
♦ QJT9	♦ AK832	♦ 4	♦ void
♣ 2	♣ 2	♣ QT2	♣ void

All of these hands should be opened at the one-level. However, despite being minimum eleven point hands. You should expect to bid at least once more (and I would expect to end up in game or slam on every hand!

Points Don't Mean Anything – The Game is Played Via Tricks

The reason those hands are so powerful (despite having only 11 HCPs) is that they will generate a lot of tricks, provided you can find a fit (which is all but assured in most of them). Having a long, powerful trump suit will yield a lot of tricks. And with a long side suit, one can often set those up as well (either by conceding losers or by ruffing them good).

These are not Pre-empts!

Recall we open at the 2-level (except for Clubs) holding a good, six card suit **and 6-10 High Card Points**.

We also open at the 3-level holding a good, seven card suit **and 6-10 High Card Points**.

Powerful, single suited hands (or powerful two-suited hands) should not be opened as pre-empts.

Rather, we should open at the 1-level and then jump (**usually to game!**) on our second bid. Our partner will then know both that we have a long suit **and** that it was too good to pre-empt. These hands often make slam and if you open at the 3-level there is an excellent chance you will play there for a very poor score.