<u>Competitive Part-Score Bidding and "The Law of Total Tricks"</u>
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<u>General Principles:</u>

1. Shapely hands are offensive, balanced hands are defensive.

2. Points in your long suits are offensive, points in your short suits, or the opponent's suits, are defensive.

3. Count length points as well as HC points. Example: When Opener bids 1 Major with a 6 card suit and a bare minimum 11 HC, and partner makes a limit raise (11-12), Opener should go to game. That 6th trump is worth 2 points once the fit is found.

4. Vulnerability greatly influences the risks and rewards of competing higher. For example, if no one is vulnerable, and We bid 1 NT and make our bid with 7 tricks, we get +90. If the opponents had played 1 NT and we took the same 7 tricks we would only get +50. If we went set one trick, we would be -50, but if the opponents bid 1 NT and took the same 7 tricks, we would be -90. If we played 1 NT and went down 2, for -100, that is better than the -120 we would get if the opponents had bid 1 NT. In general, when we bid 1 NT with both sides non-vulnerable, whether we take 5, 6, 7, or 8 tricks, we do better than if the opponents had bid 1 NT. This point applies for suit bids as well as NT, and can be exploited by following "the LAW". The lesson is to bid more when non-vulnerable, and defend more when vulnerable.

The Law of Total Tricks:

1. The total number of trump we have in our best suit + the total number of trump the opponents have in their best suit is called 'Total Trump' (an artificial notion). The number of tricks we can take playing in our best suit + the number of tricks the opponents can take playing in their best suit is called 'Total Tricks' (an artificial notion). The Law of Total Tricks says, on any hand, 'Total trump = Total tricks'.

   Thus, if we have 8 spades and the opponents have 9 clubs, and we bid to 2 Spades, and they compete to 3 Clubs, there are 17 "Total trump," and thus 17 "Total tricks." We don't know how many of those 17 we will get if we bid 3 Spades, but, if the LAW is accurate, it does not matter. If we can take 8 tricks, and go down 1 in 3 Spades, for -50, that means that they can take 9 tricks playing in 3 C, and we would then be -110. If we can take 9 tricks, for +140, they would only be able to take 8, and we would only get +50 for setting them. Indeed, if both sides are non-vulnerable, and if the number of Total Tricks is 17, we are better off by bidding 3 S than we are defending 3 C whenever we can take 7 or more tricks playing in spades (assuming no one Doubles), and we break even if we can only take 6 tricks. NOTE: We do not have to count our points to determine whether to compete to 3 Spades. The LAW holds no matter how weak we are, BUT, the weaker we are the more likely it is that the opponents may Double, and that usually is not good.

2. The LAW is not completely accurate on every deal. However, it is rarely off more than 1 trick, with any deviation from predicted results on the high side as often as on the low side, so it provides an appropriate average to play for. Furthermore, whether the LAW may be off on the high side or the low side is to a significant extent predictable, and these factors can be taken

account of with "modifications."   Larry Cohen says that no expert is good enough to improve their results by fighting the law, provided that such modifications are taken into account.

3. **Roughly, one should compete to the 2 level whenever *either* side has an 8 card fit, and to the 3 level whenever *either* side has a 9 card fit.** In general, competing higher is justified whenever trump length dictates that one side or the other can make their bid. For example, if 18 total tricks are available, one should compete 4-over-3 because either there will be 9 tricks in the 3 level contract, or, if only 8, that leaves 10 tricks in the 4 level contract. Furthermore, on close decisions one may take into account "declarer advantage," as declarers have an easier time than defenders do of realizing or exceeding the theoretical prediction of the LAW.

4. This formulation is conservative enough to hold when vulnerable.   However, there are occasions where the LAW sanctions slightly weaker standards non-vulnerable, e.g. bidding 2 of a suit over 1 NT with only a 7 card fit, or bidding 3-over-3 when non-vulnerable and suspecting that each side has an 8 card fit. In general, the -200 penalty for going down 2 when vulnerable means that one has to be close to making one's bid when competing vulnerable. When non-vulnerable, it is fair to say that **on part-score deals, players should just bid their shape, not their HC points, up to the level warranted by the LAW.**   However, when the opponents Double, the LAW no longer provides protection for aggressive bidding. Good texture in the trump suit is the principal protection against Doubles.

5. When bidding decisions reach the game level, LAW decisions are very different because of the game bonus. However, sacrifices are of course possible, and the LAW is relevant, but it should be kept in mind that the LAW is less accurate at higher levels, with there often being fewer tricks available than the total trump count. It is a common recommendation that "The 5-level belongs to the opponents."

6. Modifications: It is possible to predict when the LAW is going to be inaccurate.
    a) Hands with shortness (a singleton) are likely to have an extra "total trick," and hands with more extreme shape are very likely to have 1 or even more extra tricks. It does depend what shortness is opposite in partner's hand.
    b) Hands with honors in the opponent's suit, or in partner's short suits, often have fewer tricks available than the LAW suggests. 4-3-3-3 shape hands also often result in a trick less than the trump count.

Conventions that help exploit the LAW

1. Support Doubles

2. **Jump Overcalls** to the 2 level with a 6 card suit can be played with a wide range in high cards, e.g. 5-13. After all, how high we bid will likely be determined by our number of trump anyway.   The jump overcall takes up the opponent's bidding room, and, as it may have significant defensive values, it may be dangerous for the opponents to compete. When partner does have a fit and game interest, an Ogust type 2 NT works well, with a 3 C response showing 5-7 HC and a bad suit, 3 D showing 5-7 HC and a good suit, 3 H, showing 8-10 HC and a bad suit, 3 S showing 8-10 HC and a good suit, 3 NT showing an opening hand with a stopper in the opponent's suit and   no singleton, and 4 of one's Major showing an opening hand and an inability to bid 3 NT.