

It might seem a very simple question but how would you play a combination of AKxx opposite Qxx ?

In a no-trump contract you'd cash the top three honours and hope for a 3-3 split so that you would make four tricks in the suit. You might play off winners in another suit first in case a defender with length in this suit made the mistake of discarding from it.

In a trump contract there might be other things to consider, as on the deal below :

A875
AK4
Q62
A103

Q2
108732
AK54
75

South played in Four Hearts and West led a low spade. Dummy played low, East won with the King and switched to the King of clubs. Declarer won with dummy's Ace and cashed the top two trumps but West discarded on the second round. A low spade over to the Queen left South on lead in this position after five tricks. Declarer has lost one spade trick and must lose two trump tricks :

A8
4
Q62
103

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1087
AK54
7

What should declarer play next ?

It looks natural to lead a low diamond over to dummy's Queen followed by the Ace of spades for a club discard ... but you will finish one down if you try that. This is what will happen : after winning the Ace of spades, you lead a diamond back over to your Ace and King, but East ruffs your King of diamonds and cashes his winning trump, removing dummy's last trump in the process. Now there is nowhere for your last diamond to go and West wins the last trick in diamonds to put you one down.

Unlucky you might think. Had the diamonds split 3-3 it would have been easy. But look again at the position above. Instead of leading a low diamond over to dummy's Queen, look what happens if South cashes the Ace of diamonds first and *then* leads low to dummy's Queen :

A8
4
6
103

9
QJ
--
Q42

--
1087
K5
7

Dummy's Ace of spades is led and South discards his losing club. When dummy leads his last diamond, East has no winning play. If he ruffs, South plays his five of diamonds. If East does not ruff, South wins the King of diamonds and ruffs the five of diamonds in dummy. East can overruff, and win his last trump, but that is only three tricks for the defence. This careful play by South, very easy to overlook, brings home the contract.