



Crossruffing the Whole Hand

by Bob Gruber

It's down to the last 3 or 4 cards and declarer claims "on a cross ruff." Clearly, this late-in-the-hand claim is not what's meant by crossruffing the whole hand, so let's start at the beginning.

Good technique for playing a bridge hand starts with planning your play at trick one, before playing a single card from dummy. After counting the losers in the Master Hand, you look for ways to eliminate them. One way to do this is a strategy called crossruffing. This strategy works when both hands are short in different side suits and have long trump holdings, allowing you to make more tricks by ruffing out these side suits instead of drawing trump. (Note, when we play a crossruff, we no longer think in terms of a Master Hand and a Support Hand.) Here's an example:

Contract: 4♠ by West. Opening lead is not a trump.

♠ A K 10 8 3		♠ Q J 9 7 2
♥ 10 9 4 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N E W S </div>	♥ 7
♦ K 7 2		♦ A 4
♣ 9		♣ A 9 6 3 2

In this hand, drawing trumps would leave you with heart and diamond losers in the West hand, without a good side suit to pitch them on. If trumps are 3-0 and you choose to pull them all, you'll be able to ruff two (2) of West's five (5) losers and make 4. If you choose to set up East's hand, it also has five (5) losers, so you make 4.

If trumps are 2-1, three (3) ruffs are available and you make 5. Is there a path to make more than that? Let's examine the crossruff.

To start, don't draw trumps. Instead, establish a crossruff of hearts/diamonds in the East hand and clubs in the West hand. The first 7 tricks will include cashing the ♦K and ♦A, and leading the ♥7. The defenders do best to win the ♥ and lead a trump. Win that return and cash the ♣A and ruff a club low. Now ruff a ♥ low. If successful, you have 6 winners "in" and only 1 loser so far. As importantly, you have the 6 high trumps left and 6 losers left to use them on. Even if the opponents run out of a side suit, their trumps are not high enough to stop you from taking the rest of the tricks. Making 6!

Elements of a Good Crossruffing Hand

- ♥ Each Hand has Shortness in a (Different) Side Suit
Ideally, there are opposing side suit singletons (can be doubletons or voids) with the other hand having length in the suit (3-5 cards).
- ♥ Each Hand has Trump Length
Crossruffs tend to work best when trumps are split fairly evenly between declarer and dummy, such as 4-4, 4-5, 5-5, etc. Trump divisions like 5-3, 6-3, etc. are usually more suited to the standard technique of ruffing in the Support Hand, the hand with fewer trumps.
- ♥ Each Hand has Trump Strength
To crossruff without drawing trump, you will need to be very strong in the trump suit to prevent overruffs by the opponents.
- ♥ The Side Suits Opposite Shortness Have Lots of Losers and Maybe a Top Trick or Two
Hands with "aces and spaces" in the side suits make the best crossruffing hands.



Crossruff Preparation

Cash side suit winners early before commencing a cross-ruff, otherwise the opponents may discard in that side suit allowing them to trump your winner(s) later.

Defense against the Crossruff

If the bidding leads you to suspect the declaring side has a potential crossruff, lead trumps whenever possible, especially the opening lead, to remove trumps from both declarer's and dummy's hands.

Planning the Play Exercise

For the following hands identify which of three (3) strategies would work best: crossruffing, drawing trump and setting up a side suit, or ruffing in the hand shorter in trumps, the Support Hand.

Hand #1 – Contract: 4♥

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

Hand #2 – Contract: 4♠

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

Hand #3 – Contract: 4♥

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

Answers:

Hand #1: Crossruffing. You have shortness in two (different) side suits—♠s & ♣s—good trumps and no prospects to develop a side suit.

Hand #2: Ruffing (Clubs) in the Support Hand, the hand shorter in trumps. While you could crossruff clubs and hearts, you are better served dumping your heart loser (or a club loser) on a good diamond and ruffing losing clubs in the Support Hand.

Hand #3: Drawing trumps and setting up a side suit (diamonds).

OK. Now that we've acknowledged that not all hands are best suited for a complete crossruff, let's look at some other examples of crossruff hands.



Suppose the ♣K is led against your 4♠ contract and you hold the following cards:

♠ A J 9 8	♠ K Q T 7	If you win the Ace of Clubs and then draw four rounds of trumps, you will take only six tricks. If, instead, you cash the ♣A, the ♦A, and then then ruff back and forth in the minor suits—without ever leading trumps—you will accumulate a total of ten tricks.
♥ 6 4 2	♥ 7 5 3	
♦ 6	♦ A 5 4 3 2	
♣ A 5 4 3 2	♣ 6	

♠ K J 10 7	♠ A Q 9 8	Like the last hand, your side suits in a 4♠ contract are too weak to set up. But you can cash 3 side suit aces (♥A last), ruff 4 hearts in the East hand, while ruffing 3 clubs in the West hand, and still have a trump left in the West hand for an 11 th trick. Note, a trump lead will hold you to 10 tricks.
♥ A 8 5 4 2	♥ 6	
♦ 10 4 3	♦ A 7 6 2	
♣ 7	♣ A 8 6 5	

♠ A 8 5 2 ♥ K J 5 3 ♦ K J 7 2 ♣ J	♠ J 7 6 4 ♥ Q 10 8 6 ♦ 10 9 ♣ K Q 10	<p>After a lengthy, uncontested auction, East lands in 5♦.</p> <p>South leads the ♠K. The ♠ and ♣ holdings—Ace empty 3rd or 4th opposite a singleton—are classic signposts a crossruff may succeed. The next marker is strong trumps in each hand. Check, just barely. But the 4-4 spade split is needed also. After winning the ♠A, be sure to cash the ♣A and ruff a club, which finishes cashing all the side suit winners and enables the transportation to ruff 4 clubs¹.</p>
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K Q 10 3 ♥ A 4 2 ♦ 8 6 ♣ 9 8 5 3	
	♠ 9 ♥ 9 7 ♦ A Q 5 4 3 ♣ A 7 6 4 2	

♠ A K J 9 8 ♥ A 9 8 7 6 ♦ K 6 5 ♣ ---	♠ 4 3 2 ♥ Q J 10 5 4 3 ♦ J 4 ♣ J 7	<p>After East raises to 2♠, an overly optimistic West shoots out 6♠.</p> <p>North's ♥Q is taken by West's ♥A. Fortunately, all your trumps are high and 4 small ♥s can be ruffed in the East hand. A possible snag is having a ♦ winner ruffed. To avoid this pitfall, just cash the ♦A and ♦K before starting the crossruff. (Thereafter ♣ ruffs provide the transportation back to the West hand.) Again, note that a trump lead holds you to 1 less trick.</p>
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 5 ♥ K ♦ Q 10 9 8 7 ♣ A K Q 10 9 8	
	♠ Q 10 7 6 ♥ 2 ♦ A 3 2 ♣ 6 5 4 3 2	

¹ When crossruffing an unequal number of losers, it's usually best to start the crossruff by ruffing the suit in which you have the greater number of losers.