



Recognizing and Effecting an Uppercut

by Bob Gruber

A brief definition of an Uppercut is:

an attempt to create a trump trick where one doesn't exist

The uppercut is almost always by the defense. A couple of actions to note are:

- 1) It often involves giving a ruff-and-sluff—not usually desirable
- 2) When you do give a ruff-and-sluff, partner must also be void and ruff high enough to force the next hand (either dummy or declarer) to ruff with a relatively high trump.

These actions are not absolutely necessary, but are usually present when an uppercut is effected.

From my personal experience, I can recollect when I was the victim of an uppercut as a declarer.

The opponents took a few tricks to start & RHO then led a suit where both dummy and I were void.

In trumps, dummy held **AK5** and I had 6 trumps to the **J98742**.

I had no side-suit losers anywhere, so I pitched a side suit from hand, planning to ruff with the 5 in dummy.

Well, LHO produced the 6 of trumps, forcing me to use the K to win the trick.

When the opponents trumps turned out to be split **W: 6 3, E: Q 10**, the Q had been promoted into a winner. Had any other suit been lead, I would have won and cashed the AK of trumps and then claimed the rest of the tricks. (Yes, I should have ruffed with the J in hand and been home free when it held, but the opponents gave me a chance to go wrong and I took it!)

	AK5	
63		QT
	J98742	

We can now identify some typical signposts to help recognize when a hand is a candidate for an uppercut.

1. There are no more side-suit winners for the defense
 - a. Be sure to first cash all side-suit winners before attempting an uppercut
 - i. If you don't, declarer can often counter by pitching a side-suit loser and you'll just be trading a trump winner for that side-suit winner
2. One opponent hand holds a high trump or two with only small trumps to go with them
3. One defender has a trump holding almost good enough to win a trick on its own, frequently Qx or Jxx
 - a. This defender is usually the one to seek an uppercut by partner
 - i. The partner being asked to "uppercut" usually has a short holding in the trump suit

At this point, the best instruction is probably seeing some uppercuts in action.

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

South has shown a strong hand on the way to a 5♦ contract. West starts the defense with the ♠A and ♠K and pauses briefly for thought. After deciding to try for an uppercut by leading another spade, West needs to lead a card that will make East ruff. With that thought in mind, West leads the ♠2.

The spotlight turns to East. Knowing that South has a strong hand, it should occur to East that West is trying for an uppercut. If so, East needs to ruff with the ♦Q not the ♦2. With the benefit of the diagram, we can see that the 2 allows declarer to ruff low and score the rest of the tricks, but the ♦Q promotes a trump trick for partner.

When you want partner to ruff (high), trying for an uppercut, lead a loser, not a winner.



S	W	N	E
1♠	P	2♣	P
2♠	P	4♠	all pass

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

West leads the ♥A. How should East plan the defense?

East wants ♥ continued, so signals with his ♥9 at trick one. West cashes his ♥K and plays his third heart. After East wins his queen, what does he do next?

East should count the high card points. South showed 12 to 14, the dummy has 13. West has already produced 7, and East has 7. Since all 4 jacks are visible, West cannot have another HCP. The only chance for a 4th trick lies in the trump suit. East must lead his last heart. Here, when West ruffs with the ♠9, it uppercuts dummy's queen and promotes a ♠ trick for East.

When you have taken every possible side-suit trick, give a ruff-and-sluff. It might result in a trump promotion or an uppercut.

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

South is declarer in a spade contract. West is on lead at trick 8. With a ♠, ♦ or ♣ lead, South will win, draw trumps and claim. But if West plays a ♥, East should ruff high with his ♠J. Now, if South overruffs with the ace or king, West's queen will be promoted into a winner. If South doesn't overruff, the jack will win. In either case, the defense is assured of an otherwise unavailable trump trick. (Note that the ♠2 allows South to ruff cheaply and draw trumps without a loser. East must reason that the ♠J is unlikely to win a trick on its own, but may promote a trump for partner.)

If it seems partner might be trying for an uppercut, cooperate by ruffing with a trump high enough to force a high trump from the next hand.

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

South is in 4♠. You, West, lead ♦A/K/Q. What next?

Looking at dummy, are there any ♥ or ♣ losers for declarer? No and No. But, there's an outside chance your ♠J can be promoted into a winner if partner has the ♠Q and uses it to uppercut declarer. Therefore, at trick 4 you should lead the ♦5.

Switching to the East seat, you should realize West had easy exits in ♥ and ♣ but instead choose to give declarer a ruff-and-sluff. Why? The only sensible explanation is West wants you to try to uppercut South's trump holding. So, you ruff with the ♠Q and the defense is rewarded with a trump winner.



♠ J 8
 ♥ A 8 7 3
 ♦ A Q J 2
 ♣ K J T

♠ 9 2
 ♥ T 9 6 4 2
 ♦ 9 8 6 5 3
 ♣ 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K Q T 6 3
 ♥ J 5
 ♦ T 7
 ♣ Q 9 8

♠ 7 5 4
 ♥ K Q
 ♦ K 4
 ♣ A 7 6 5 4 3

E	S	W	N
1 ♠	2 ♣	P	2 ♠
Dbl	3 ♣	P	5 ♣
All pass			

West leads the ♠9. East wins the ♠Q and ♠A. The auction and dummy's holding have told East (and South) that West is broke. The only hope for the defense is a trump trick, but South will finesse against East's ♣Q. Given East's good spot cards in ♣, an uppercut will do the trick. At trick 3, East led his ♠K. South followed suit and North had to ruff with the ♣10. East was now assured of a ♣ trick.