

# Tricks With Trumps

Ipswich & Kesgrave  
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# Managing Trumps

- ▶ Well over half of all deals are declared in a trump suit. Unlike play at no-trumps many concepts associated with suit-play are counter-intuitive:
  - At no-trumps, the 3-card suits AKQ opposite J109 can only ever take three tricks but trumps can take tricks *separately*.
  - Unlike discards, which are generally low cards, when trumps are played on another suit they are often high cards and this creates 'holes' in the ranking. When someone ruffs with the ♠J, the ♠10 'moves up one'
  - The tempo of card-play 'speeds up'; care is required by defence (mainly) and declarer that high cards do not fall to low trumps.
  - You can't make a grand slam missing the ace of trumps.

# Jargon

Trumps are trumps... What then are ruffs?

Ruffing is playing a trump on another suit. It may seem that 'ruff' is simply synonym for 'trump' but that's because 'trump' as a verb is overloaded.

You can "draw trumps" not "draw ruffs".

"Take a ruff" means something different to "take a trump".

A ruff is different to a trump: when we count tricks we will be careful to distinguish between 'trumps' and 'ruffs'.

# The Topics

1. Managing Trumps and Keeping Control
2. Taking Ruffs – 'Ruff and Draw'
3. Taking Ruffs – 'Draw and Ruff'
4. Suit Establishment
5. Cross-Ruffs
6. Mixed Strategies

# How to be Declarer

In *Dynamic Declarer Play*, Krzysztof Martens writes:

The time available at the bridge table is limited. A player who wastes too much time on technical analysis of the hand will not be able to concentrate fully on these aspects:

1. Analysing the opening lead.
2. Operating skilfully with small cards to obstruct the defender's signals.
3. Making psychological plays.
4. Demonstrating table presence.
5. Camouflaging his intentions.

Shortly after he notes, "**Learning declarer play is a job**" (his emphasis), one honed by practice and repetition. I make no apology therefore for repeating several themes and though items on his list are largely outside today's scope, I will touch on making sense of the opening lead.

# Managing Trumps (1)

- ▶ Drawing trumps is great. Always draw trumps if doing so is sufficient to make the contract.
  - If you can't ruff anything – because you have no length-losers opposite shortage – **draw trumps**.
  - Protect your side-suit winners from opposing ruffs – **draw trumps**.
  - Count winners: if you don't need more tricks than your longer trump-length – **draw trumps**.
- ▶ Be careful...
  - Don't use up entries you need later.
  - End in the right hand to do whatever is next.
- ▶ But it's a bit more complicated than that...

# Managing Trumps (2)

- ▶ If drawing trumps leaves you with none left, beware!
- ▶ The same applies when drawing trumps leaves too few to counter subsequent *forces* – when the defence makes you ruff.
- ▶ Without the ability to regain the lead by ruffing you are effectively declaring no-trumps (something you tried to avoid in the auction).
- ▶ That brings us to the problems of *trump control*.
- ▶ Let's look at some examples (after the small print).

# House Rules

- ▶ We will consider examples all of which are taken from actual play, at club, tournament and international level.
  - No worrying about the auction: there will be many unfamiliar methods. We will only be concerned with what opponents have shown.
  - Unless otherwise noted all deals are from teams play when ensuring the contract is paramount.
  - We will look at deals from declarer's perspective: there is not time tonight to overly discuss defender's play – sorry.
  - But... I will try to add value to situations that arise, don't be afraid to ask questions or for clarifications.



# Trump Control

## Lessons from the Examples

- ▶ Don't take unnecessary ruffs; don't force yourself.
- ▶ Leave trumps in both hands when an unwelcome force is threatened.
- ▶ Be prepared not to ruff even though you can, achieving the safety of 'trumps in both hands'.
- ▶ Be especially careful when you lack top trumps.
- ▶ Consider (carefully) risky strategies such as discarding the force-suit or making 'odd ducks'.

# Taking Ruffs for Extra Tricks

- ▶ Time to consider using trumps separately, that is scoring tricks in addition to playing out the trump suit.
- ▶ There are three principal types of 'ruffing game', depending on whether you can draw trumps before, after or never.

# Ruffing – My Jargon

**Ruff and draw:** you take what ruffs you can/need then draw trumps. Almost always to safeguard side-suit winners.

**Draw and ruff:** you have sufficient trumps so that you can remove those of the opponents before scoring yours separately.

**Crossruff:** you ruff in both hands to the extent that you cannot draw trumps after you have finished.

# Ruff and Draw (1)

► ♠ XXX  
♥ XXXX  
♦ XX  
♣ XXX

♠ XXXXX  
♥ XX  
♦ XXX  
♣ XXX

- Spades are trumps
- There are two ruffing plans: two hearts ruffed in South,
- ...or one diamond in North
- But heart ruffs do not increase the number of trump tricks because top cards and length have already been counted (5, 4 or whatever it might be).
- The only productive ruff is a **diamond**.
- Let's fill in the 'x's

# Ruff and Draw (2)

► ♠ A32  
♥ 8532  
♦ 94  
♣ KJ9

♠ KQJ97  
♥ 74  
♦ A72  
♣ Q52

- Spades are trumps
- The defence lead ♥K and switch to a trump.
- Because a diamond must be lost before the ruff can be taken, declarer cannot delay. She must lose a diamond immediately. Losing the lead in clubs or hearts (or playing another spade!) would enable the defence to play another trump and then a third when in with a diamond.
- Tricks:  $5♠ + 1\text{Ruff} + 1♦ + 2♣ = 9$

# Ruff and Draw (3)

► ♠ 832  
♥ 8532  
♦ K4  
♣ KJ9

♠ KQJ97  
♥ 74  
♦ A72  
♣ Q52

- Spades are trumps
- The defence lead ♥K and switch to a trump, *holding up the ace*.
- Though a diamond need not be lost before the ruff can be taken, again declarer cannot delay and must take the diamond ruff now. Losing the lead in clubs or hearts would enable the defence to play ace and another trump depriving declarer of the diamond ruff.
- Tricks: 4♠+1Ruff+2♦+2♣ = 9

# Ruff and Draw (4)

► ♠ A32  
♥ 8532  
♦ K4  
♣ J93

♠ KQJ97  
♥ 74  
♦ A72  
♣ Q52

- Spades are trumps
- The defence lead ♥K and switch to a trump
- Now the defence is not able to draw a third trump if they gain the lead as South has trump control *and* can take the ruff without conceding a trick. Declarer may play another suit before ruffing a diamond, should she?
- Perhaps – finesse the club nine.
- Tricks: 5♠+1Ruff+2♦ = 8  
9 if a club trick emerges

# Ruff and Draw (5)

► ♠ A32  
♥ 8532  
♦ K4  
♣ J93

♠ KQJ97  
♥ 74  
♦ AQ2  
♣ 752

- Spades are trumps
- The defence lead ♥K and switch to a trump
- There is no diamond to ruff as declarer has all top cards – any ideas?
- Declarer can transfer the ruff to clubs by winning three diamonds (K-A-Q) discarding a club. Then concede a club; two must be lost before a club can be ruffed in dummy.
- Tricks:  $5♠ + 1\text{Ruff} + 3♦ = 9$



# Ruff and Draw – Key Points

- ▶ This strategy is characterised by long-short fits, such as 5-3, 6-3 or 5-4.
- ▶ Time is of the essence: except for contract-endangering threats, generally take ruffs as soon as possible.
- ▶ When you have nine combined trumps, often you must take ruffs early in case opponents' split 3-1 (50%).
- ▶ Let's look at some examples...

# Ruff and Draw

## Lessons from the Examples

- ▶ In general, don't touch trumps; if you think it's safe to play even one round – double check.
- ▶ Look for safe entries for subsequent ruffs.
- ▶ When you have control, arrange timing to prevent defensive overruffs; consider ducking the ruff suit and draw as many trumps as practicable.
- ▶ Be aware of the option of scoring extra ruffs in the long-trump hand - a *dummy reversal*
  - To work in a 5-4 fit, you have to ruff twice to score an extra trick
  - In a 5-3 fit you have to ruff three times in the 5-card holding *and* draw trumps with the 3-trump hand.

# Draw and Ruff (1)

► ♠ XXXXX  
♥ XXXX  
♦ X  
♣ XXX

♠ XXXXX  
♥ X  
♦ XXX  
♣ XXXX

- Spades are trumps
- There are two possible ruff strategies: ruff three hearts in South,
- ...or two diamonds and one club in North.
- **They are the same.**
- If trumps are 2-1 (78%) either approach scores the long trumps + 3.
- Let's fill in the 'x's

# Draw and Ruff (2)

► ♠ A9762  
♥ J862  
♦ 8  
♣ J64

♠ K10854  
♥ 7  
♦ 932  
♣ 10875

- Spades are trumps
- The defence lead a top heart and switch to a spade, both following.
- There is no advantage in not drawing the last trump – and claiming eight tricks.
- Tricks:  $5♠ + 3\text{Ruff} = 8$
- What contract were they playing?

# Draw and Ruff (3)

► ♠ A9762  
♥ J862  
♦ 8  
♣ J64

♠ K10854  
♥ 75  
♦ 932  
♣ 1087

- Spades are trumps
- 5-5 fits are not always so productive.
- Tricks:  $5♠ + 2\text{Ruff} = 7$
- Again, declarer should draw trumps – and, this time, claim only seven tricks.
- Because the ruffs occur naturally (unless declarer draws extra trumps!) there is no rush to take them: declarer should attend to other business rather than rush to take ruffs.

# Draw and Ruff (4)

► ♠ AQ762  
♥ K862  
♦ 8  
♣ J64

♠ K10854  
♥ 75  
♦ K32  
♣ A108

- Spades are trumps
- Trump Tricks:  $5♠ + 2\text{Ruff} = 7$
- Declarer can draw a second trump without losing a ruff (he has two ruffs and three trumps left). After which he should try for extra tricks by leading towards the red kings.
- Tricks:  $5♠ + 2\text{Ruff} + 1♣ = 8$  (min)
- Max  $5♠ + 2\text{Ruff} + 1♣ + 1♦ + 1♥ = 10$

# Draw and Ruff – Key Points

- ▶ This strategy is characterised by having many trumps or same length in both hands, common with 5-5 and 4-4 fits.
- ▶ Usually draw trumps – unless you have cause to suspect a bad trump split.
- ▶ With opposing trumps removed, don't rush your ruffs; they are sure tricks and can wait, use the time to develop tricks elsewhere.
- ▶ Let's look at some examples...

# Draw and Ruff

## Lessons from the Examples

- ▶ Look for ways for the opponents to help you. Be aware that they may not want to lead a suit that dummy can ruff (as they remain uneducated in draw-and-ruff and ruff-and-draw techniques).
- ▶ Ruffing finesses add suit-tricks in addition to any extra trick from ruffing.
- ▶ Make any necessary assumptions about non-ruff tricks.
- ▶ If you do delay drawing trumps (because you fear a bad break) ensure your transportation before you test them.



# Suit Establishment

- ▶ When ruffing does not directly gain tricks you can still use ruffs to *establish* late winners in a side-suit. To do this you need;
  - Sufficient trumps to draw with some left over.
  - A long side-suit, ideally one with the head-start of quick winners.
  - Sufficient entries to get from hand to hand and finally to cash the small cards that have been established.
- ▶ Easier to go straight to the examples...

<b>Board No 8 None Vul Dealer West</b>									
<b>Pairs</b>		<b>Contract</b>				<b>Scores</b>		<b>Points</b>	
<b>N/S</b>	<b>E/W</b>	<b>Bid</b>	<b>By</b>	<b>Ld</b>	<b>Tks</b>	<b>N/S</b>	<b>E/W</b>	<b>N/S</b>	<b>E/W</b>
1	16	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
2	18	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
3	2	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
4	4	5♥	E	♦A	11		450	27	7
5	11	6♥	E	♣10	12		980	0	34
6	13	4♠	W	♣Q	11		450	27	7
7	15	4♥	E	♣8	12		480	12	22
9	1	4♠	W	♦J	9	50		34	0
10	6	4♥	E	♦A	11		450	27	7
11	8	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
12	10	4♥	E	♦A	11		450	27	7
13	12	4♥	E	♠Q	12		480	12	22
14	14	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
15	3	4♥	E	♣9	12		480	12	22
16	5	3♥	E	♣8	12		230	32	2
17	7	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
18	9	4♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22
19	17	5♥	E	♣10	12		480	12	22

# Suit Establishment

## Lessons from the Examples

- ▶ We have entered the counting house: you'll need to count trumps, the suit you are trying to establish *and* the entries you need.
- ▶ Draw trumps *unless* you need entries *or* ruff-and-draw tricks.
- ▶ Remember it is the cards in the set-up-suit you don't ruff that will be tricks. Counting is easier if you imagine advantageous splits and *when* you know your play has been a success.
- ▶ If you don't get the suit-division you need, look for a 'Plan B'.
- ▶ Entries are critical: count how many you need, remember you require one for each ruff and one 'at the end' to cash the winners.
- ▶ If you are ruffing your long suit with enemy trumps extant, watch out for the overruff! Make a note of the highest trump out.
- ▶ Consider conceding a trick in the suit you are establishing rather than ruffing them all.
- ▶ Consider ruffing high even if that might create a trump loser – as long as your contract is assured. Remember 'high-ruff, low-ruff overruffed' is one trick whereas 'low-ruff overruffed, trump' is no tricks.

# Crossruffs

- ▶ We now arrive at the purest form of the ruffing game – the crossruff. A reminder:
- ▶ **Crossruff**: you ruff in both hands to the extent that you cannot draw trumps after you have finished.
- ▶ But first, it's time for...



# Crossruffs (1)

- ▶ Though it is great fun the crossruff-game is quite hard – you have to count precisely or ‘see’ the play to the end.
- ▶ Once a crossruff is started there is no falling back on another plan, declarer is completely committed.
- ▶ Because declarer’s trumps are reduced or even exhausted after the ruffing spree, the defence have **trump control**. That means establishing side-suits is hopeless and even side aces and kings are in jeopardy.
- ▶ The defender’s strategy is clear – lead trumps at all times. Any miscalculation by declarer, say unnecessarily losing the lead or being overruffed, will likely be fatal.
- ▶ Crossruffs typically occur when there are few tricks outside trumps – almost as a matter of necessity – but they are often missed as the safest line.

# Crossruffs (2)

- ▶ Check – and double-check – before you play any trumps.
- ▶ Cash plain-suit winners first. If you need them for entries, use them early before the defence can make discards.
- ▶ Even though it is good practice in any form of the ruffing-game, it is essential in a crossruff to keep track of the defence's highest trump.
- ▶ Form a picture of the unseen hands to decide which ruffs are 'safe' – not likely to be overruffed – and which are not. Take safe ruffs early with low trumps; ruff high in unsafe situations.
- ▶ Let's go to the examples...

# Crossruffs

## Lessons from the Examples

- ▶ More counting: **count trumps, count entries.**
- ▶ Before you start, calculate how many tricks you need from the trump suit:
  - Count entries to the opposite hand.
  - Typically one hand will take more ruffs; ensure you start ruffing there first (if the ruffs are balanced, it doesn't matter).
  - Use plain-suit entries first.
- ▶ Again, make note of the highest outstanding trump:
  - Once all your remaining ruffs are higher, you're home free!
  - If you don't need to score all your trumps, ruff high – suffering an overruff and allowing the defence to lead trumps is often fatal.
- ▶ Be *very wary* of taking even a single round of trumps.

# Mixed Strategies

- ▶ This is by no means a complete categorisation of ruffing techniques, how could it be? If it were this simple no-one would play the game!
- ▶ Many deals involve a mix of approaches, either because declarer's initial plan is thwarted by the defence's counters or the winning idea is a mix of, say, draw-and-ruff and crossruff.
- ▶ Often it is simply a good idea to stay flexible, for instance, when your contract is less than optimal.
- ▶ These are just a few examples, beginning with an important type, 'Cash and Thrash'.



# Mixed Strategies

## Lessons from the Examples

### ► Cash and Thrash:

- Typical in hands with a trump loser (or two).
- Identifiable by “all the tricks except for that trump-loser (or two)”.
- Ensure that opponents cannot usefully gain the lead and cash winning trump(s) – because some of your tricks come from crossruffs.
- That often means ducking a trump before you start the ‘thrash’.
- Likewise establish outside winners first.

### ► Playing bad contracts:

- Use trumps wisely; it is usually not in declarer’s interest to draw trumps when a bad split is expected (for example when doubled at a low level).
- You will often be in a draw-and-ruff situation where you can make the last two separately anyway, use them to support setting up side-suit tricks.
- Play side-suits where the best approach is straightforward or noncommittal.
- Remember defence is difficult and can be nervy in doubled contracts.

# One Thing ...

As a famous bridge teacher\* says, if you've got this far and only take one thing from this:

Understand the difference between ruff-and-draw, when ruffs must be taken quickly, and draw-and-ruff, when you can take your time.

\* = Andrew Robson OBE

## ... And a Few More

1. Don't start play until you've counted trumps, counted tricks and counted entries – and have a plan.
2. Use trumps to establish long suits.
3. Cash your side-suit winners before a crossruff.
4. Look for cash and thrash opportunities.
5. Don't draw trumps in bad contracts.

# Following Up

- ▶ The BBO Handviewer is used in all Vugraph presentations and is readily employed for stepping through play to prepare deals as here. There is an archive of matches and during major events, commentary in real time. See, <http://www.bridgebase.com/>, start by watching a few deals.
- ▶ *The Rodwell Files: Secrets of a World Bridge Champion* by Eric Rodwell (2011, with Mark Horton) is an authoritative and fresh look at declarer play. Rodwell coins many useful terms for explaining his thoughts and once they are learnt, make for great elucidation. A modern classic but a steep learning curve.
- ▶ *Bridge University* is an imprint on bidding, defence and declarer play published by Krzysztof Martens, coach to the Polish team and now playing for Monaco. Those on play, *Dynamic Declarer Play Parts 1 & 2* and *Practical Aspects of Declarer Play* are very good – but demand a high level of prior experience. If you don't know anything about squeeze play, don't start here. They are however, excellent on card reading and forming a picture of the unseen hands.