

# The Exciting World of Bridge – Lesson 9

## Managing the Trump Suit

### Introduction

Tonight we'll look at two ways of eliminating losers that are used exclusively in trump contracts. They take advantage of the power of the trump suit. After all, even an ace in another suit can fall to the lowliest trump card.

In order to make use of these trump cards, the side suits (suits other than the trump suit) have to be unevenly divided with the potential of creating a void on one side of the table or the other. When the void is created in the dummy, declarer can ruff losers with dummy's trumps. If dummy has extra winners in another side suit, declarer can eliminate losers by throwing them on the extra winners in dummy.

Let's start by looking at ruffing losers in the dummy.

### Ruffing Losers in Dummy

Let's start by saying that this title isn't really correct. As we make our plan, we need to choose one hand to be the "Captain" hand. This isn't always going to be the Dummy, it may be Declarer's hand! Generally we want to take our ruffs in the hand with the shorter trumps as ruffing in the hand with longer trumps doesn't create extra tricks. For the remainder of this lesson, for ease of discussion, we will assume that Declarer's hand is also the Captain hand. Let's start with the most basic of examples:

Clubs are trumps and here are two of our side suits:

Dummy	Declarer
♠xxx	♠A
♥A	♥xxx

In each case, the suits are unevenly divided between the Dummy and the Declarer. Remember, when you are counting losers, you focus on the Captain hand. Let's assume in this example we've decided that Declarer's hand is Captain. There are no spade losers and two heart losers. You can eliminate your heart losers by ruffing them in the dummy. On the other hand, you don't have to get rid of the spade losers by ruffing them in declarer's hand because declarer doesn't have any spade losers.

Declarer can ruff losers in the dummy when the declarer has more cards in the suit than dummy and there is the potential for dummy to become void in the suit.

Side suits that are equally divided between Declarer's hand and the Dummy do not provide an opportunity to ruff losers. The cards in a side suit have to be unevenly divided with the Captain hand having more cards than the other to allow losers to be ruffed.

## Managing Trumps

Managing the trump suit is a very important part of the PLAN. It's especially important when you decide you want to ruff losers in the Dummy. You have to have trumps in the Dummy to do this.

There is a dilemma. On the one hand, it's generally a good idea to draw the opponents' trumps because they might be used to turn some of your winners into unexpected losers. On the other hand, you don't want to play your own trumps, so that you don't have any in the Dummy when you need them. The first thing to consider is how many trumps you are going to need in the dummy to take care of declarer's losers.

Let's look at some examples. In each of the following, how many losers do we need to trump?

Dummy:	1) Kx	2) -	3) A	4) Qx	5) QJ
Declarer:	Axx	Jxx	xxx	AKx	xxx

In the first example, Declarer needs to ruff once in Dummy, in the second 3 times. In the third example, Declarer needs to ruff twice. In the fourth example Declarer doesn't need to ruff at all and finally in the last example, Declarer needs to ruff once.

When Declarer decides the best way to eliminate a loser is to ruff it in the Dummy, Declarer has to calculate how many trumps will be needed to do the job. Declarer can draw some of the outstanding trumps as long as enough remain in the Dummy to ruff Declarer's losers.

## Preparing to Ruff Losers

Sometimes the Declarer can start to ruff losers in the Dummy without giving up the lead to the opponents. At other times, it's necessary to give up the lead once or twice before the conditions are right.

Let's look at some examples:

Dummy:	1) Ax	2) J	3) xx	4) -	5) x
Declarer:	xxx	Txx	xxx	xxx	Axx
Answer	Once	Once	Twice	Zero	Zero

Sometimes, before you can ruff a loser in the Dummy, you have to give up the lead to the opponents once or even twice. This can be nerve-wracking, since you wonder what the opponents will do when they get the lead. You'll have to learn to live with this, because it's often the only way to get the extra trick you need to make the contract. It's also very important to keep this in mind before you pull any trump. If you've decided you only need to ruff once, you might think it's okay to leave just one trump in Dummy. The problem is that if you need to lose the lead before you ruff, the Defender that wins that trick might pull the last trump from Dummy on you!

## Discarding Losers

The focus for discarding losers is still on the Dummy. There has to be a suit that has the potential to give Declarer a chance to throw away a loser from declarer's hand. It's important to understand that instead of ruffing a loser in the Dummy, Declarer is throwing away a loser on one of Dummy's extra winners. The pattern to recognize this situation is that Dummy has more cards in a side suit than the Declarer has.

Let's look at some examples (Spades are trump):

1) Dummy ♥AKQ      Declarer ♥xx

There isn't an opportunity to ruff a loser in the Dummy because the Dummy has more cards than the Declarer. Declarer has two losers and both are taken care of by Dummy's high cards. When there are more cards in the Dummy than in Declarer's hand and the cards are winners, as in this example, the opportunity exists to throw away a loser in another suit. When Dummy plays hearts for the third time, Declarer will be void and can discard a loser on a winner.

2) Dummy ♥KQJ      Declarer ♥xx

This time, one of Declarer's losers is taken care of by the high cards in the Dummy. Once the ♥A is driven out, the ♥Q and ♥J are winners and Dummy has an extra winner on which Declarer can throw a loser.

3) Dummy ♥AQJ      Declarer ♥xx

This suit may offer the same potential as a suit with the ace, king and queen in the Dummy, depending on where the ♥K is. If the "correct" player has the king, then Declarer can finesse for it, not lose any tricks in the suit and have an extra winner in the Dummy if declarer repeats the finesse. If the king is held by the "wrong" player, Declarer loses a trick, but then the Dummy still has an extra winner.

4) Dummy ♥AKxxx      Declarer ♥xxx

This is a tricky one. Here Declarer has a sure loser but can quite probably promote two winners (assuming the suit splits 3-2). Even if the suit splits 4-1, one winner can be promoted.

When you are looking at alternative ways of disposing of losers in a trump contract, look to see if Dummy has additional winners in a side suit — a suit other than the trump suit — on which to throw your losers. It often happens that when you have weakness in one area, it's compensated for by extra strength somewhere else.

## Bonus Lesson – Making a Wish

Here's a little secret for you – you will often be in a contract that has little or no chance of making! When this happens it's quite easy to start to get careless due to this feeling of despair. This is completely the wrong attitude! What you need to do in these situations is the following: 1) Think about the fact that there will be others in the room (assuming you're playing duplicate) that will be in the exact same contract. If you can play this contract well you should end up tying and possibly beating some of them. If that's the case you can "salvage" the board so that it isn't a complete disaster. 2) Recognize that there may be a slight chance to make it. If there's a slight chance then make a wish! Hope that the cards will be where you need them to be and play it out. It's surprising how often your wish will come true.

Here's a quick example. You're in 4♠ and the Defenders have taken the first three tricks so you can't afford to lose any more. You have no other losers anywhere except possibly the trump suit. Here's your trump suit:

Dummy: ♠AKx      Declarer: ♠T98xx

We are missing the queen, the jack and three more little ones. Do we have a chance? Yes, indeed we do. As long as the spades split 3-2 AND the queen and jack are with the person in front of Dummy, we can play the suit for no losers. Alternatively, if the person behind Dummy had specifically doubleton QJ we could also play the suit for no losers. The second option is not nearly as likely as the first. So....hope that's where the cards lie and lead your ♠T. If it's not covered, play low from Dummy. If it is covered, win your ace and come back to Declarer's hand in another suit and lead the ♠9. What are the odds of this working? It's around 15%, but 15% is better than 0%.