

THROW-IN AND ELIMINATION

The term “throw-in” refers to a situation where an opponent is forced to lead at a moment where he cannot avoid making a lead which is helpful to declarer. Note that it is sometimes sufficient to pass the lead to either opponent but it is often necessary to give the lead to a specific opponent

“Elimination” is often a pre-requisite of a successful throw-in. This involves eliminating one or more suits from the north-south and/or east-west hands so that an opponent is left only with suits which declarer wants him to lead.

The following is a very simple example of a three-card ending with south on lead after an elimination process

	S AQ	
	H 6	
S 432		S K5
H -		H J
	S 87	
	H 4	

If south takes the spade finesse he will lose two tricks but he can throw east in with a heart lead and will lose only one trick.

In a trump contract declarer often tries to create a situation where the opponents’ trumps are drawn but declarer and dummy still have at least one trump each. An opponent may then be forced into one of two options which will both normally give declarer an extra trick

- Make a helpful lead into a combination of cards held by declarer and/or dummy
- Lead a suit in which declarer and dummy are both void allowing a “ruff and discard” which produces an extra trick

The following are typical combinations held by declarer and dummy where declarer’s chances are improved if the opponents can be made to lead the suit.

	N	S
1	A10x	Jxx
2	Qxx	Jxx
3	Kxx	Jxx
4	K10x	Q9x
5	A9x	Jxx
6	Ax	Qx
7	A9x	K10x

In some cases an extra trick is guaranteed and in others it is just more likely. In 2 and 3 for example you will *always* be guaranteed one trick if the opponents have to lead the suit. Similarly in 4 you will *always* be guaranteed two tricks. In 6 you will make two tricks if only if the opponent on lead holds the king.

At the same time there are several combinations where declarer can confidently open up a suit himself *if all safe exit cards have been eliminated from the opponents' hands*. Some examples are given below

	N	S
1	AQ10	xxx
2	AQ9	xxx
3	AJ10	xxx
4	A10x	J9x
5	K10x	xxx
6	K9x	Jxx
7	QJx	xxx
8	KJx	xxx

In 1-4 a lead from the south hand will guarantee two tricks and in 5-8 it will guarantee one trick. In 2, for example, you lead up to the north hand and beat whatever west plays as cheaply as possible. If you win you have two tricks. If east wins he must lead back into a finesse (or give a ruff and discard). Similarly in 6 you lead the jack from the south hand and let it run if west does not cover. If west plays the queen you cover with king. One way or another you will the always make one trick.

General tips for throw in and elimination play.

- 1 Avoid or postpone finesses
- 2 Look for opportunities to eliminate suits especially if you have plenty of trumps.
- 3 Look for card combinations where elimination will increase your chances
- 4 Look for opportunities to use a "loser on loser" play to throw in an opponent.
- 5 Consider ducking a trick to help the elimination process.
- 6 Count your opponents' distribution where you can.

Defence to throw in and elimination play

- 1 Be aware of declarer's strategy
- 2 Second hand may have to play high to thwart an endplay (See question 2)
- 3 Be prepared to unblock to prevent a throw in (See example 5)
- 4 Attack declarer's weak suits early in the play before the elimination is set up. Don't just make "safe" leads that will get ruffed if there is a good alternative. Suppose for example that west leads the ace of hearts from Axx when his partner has overcalled hearts and then sees Qxxx of hearts in dummy. A second heart will obviously be ruffed by declarer and the queen may be used later to throw the lead to east. Instead west should look for another suit to attack such as one where dummy has AQx. See also question 4.

See examples and questions below. Declarer is always south.

Example 1

	S xx H QJx D AQ53 C xxxx	
S K9xx H xxx D xx C J109x		S J10xxx H xxx D J109x C x
	S AQ H AKxx D Kxx C AKQx	

You are in 6NT and west leads the jack of clubs. You have eleven certain tricks and you first play AKQ of clubs and AKQ of diamonds to see if either suit splits 3-3 to give you an extra trick but west has four clubs and east has four diamonds. How do you aim to make your contract?

Answer. The position after the first six tricks is as follows.

	S xx H QJx D x C x	
S K9xx H xx D - C 10		S J10xx H xx D J C -
	S AQ H AKxx D - C x	

You can try the spade finesse (50% chance) but you can be certain of the contract if you can force west to lead a spade. You can give him the lead with the fourth club but at this stage he will simply lead a heart. You must therefore lead your heart winners first before playing the fourth club. West is then endplayed and must lead a spade into your AQ. This fails only if west has five hearts.

Example 2

	S xxx H AQ10xx D AKx C Kx	
S KJ9 H xxx D Jxxx C xxx	S AQ10 H KJ9xx D Qxx C Ax	S xxxx H -- D xxx C xxxxxx

You are in 6H and west leads a trump. How do you guarantee your contract?

Answer Draw trumps, cash your diamond and heart winners ending in dummy. The position is then

	S xxx H 10xx D -- C --	
S KJ9 H -- D xx C x	S AQ10 H Jxx D -- C ---	S xxx H --- D --- C xxx

Simply lead a spade and play the 10 from hand. West must then either lead back into AQ or give you a ruff and discard.

Example 3

	S A10x	
	H Q109xx	
	D 973	
	C Ax	
S 9XX		S KQxx
H xx		H x
D Q10xx		D KJ5
C Q10xx		C Jxxxx
	S Jxx	
	H AKJxx	
	D Axx	
	C K9	

You are in 4H and west leads the two of diamonds to east's king. You duck and win the second trick with the ace of diamonds. You can now claim your contract. How?

Answer. Draw trumps, cash AK of clubs and lead your last diamond. Whoever wins must give you an extra trick by leading a spade or giving you a ruff and discard in diamonds or clubs. Note that any distribution of the spades will give you two tricks if the opponents have to lead them and have no safe exit cards. Note also the importance of ducking the first trick.

Example 4

	S xx	
	H AKQxx	
	D xxx	
	C AK	
S QJ10xxxx		S x
H --		H xxx
D KJ10		D xxxx
C xxx		C QJ10xxx
	S AK3	
	H J109xx	
	D AQx	
	C xx	

West opens 3 spades and you end up in 6H. West leads the queen of spades and you win with the ace. You can now claim your contract. How?

Answer. Draw trumps and cash AK of clubs. Cash the king of spades and lead another spade. Let west win while you discard a losing diamond from dummy. This is known as "loser on loser". West is now end-played. If he leads a spade or a club he gives you a ruff and discard where you will discard the second losing diamond from dummy. If he leads a diamond he leads into a finesse.

Example 5

	S xx	
	H Kxx	
	D Jxxx	
	C KJxx	
S KQxxx		S Axxxx
H xxxx		H Jxx
D Kx		D Q10xx
C xx		C x
	S x	
	H AQx	
	D Axx	
	C AQxxxx	

You are in 5 clubs. West leads the king and queen of spades. Can you avoid losing a spade and two diamonds?

Answer Perhaps! Ruff the queen of spades. Draw trumps, play AKQ of hearts then Ax of diamonds from hand. You have to hope that one opponent has Kx or Qx of diamonds and will be unable to lead a third diamond. He must then give you a ruff and discard on which you can discard your losing diamond. In the layout above west *may* be endplayed by winning the king of diamonds . If west is very smart, however, he will play the king of diamonds under the ace so that east takes two tricks with Q10. To make this more difficult declarer should play the ace of diamonds at trick three before his strategy becomes obvious.

Example 6

	S Qx	
	H 9xxx	
	D KJxx	
	C Axx	
S K9xx		S J10xxx
H Qxx		H ---
D xx		D xxx
C QJ10x		C Kxxxx
	S Ax	
	H AKJ10xx	
	D AQ109	
	C x	

You are in 6H with no opposition bidding West leads the queen of clubs. You win and cash AK of hearts showing that west has Qxx. You seem to have a losing heart and a losing spade. Can you avoid this?

Answer 50% chance. Take the ace of clubs, ruff a club, lead a diamond to the king, ruff the last club and play your winning diamonds. If west does not ruff lead a trump. If west has the king of spades he is endplayed whenever he gets the lead. He must either lead away from the king or give you a ruff and discard.

QUIZ

Question 1

	S AQxx	
	H Jxx	
	D AKQ	
	C xxx	
S 10		S Jxx
H AKQ10		H xxxx
D 109xx		D Jxx
C KJxx		C 10xx
	S K9xxx	
	H 9x	
	D xxx	
	C AQ9	

You are in 4 spades after west opened one heart. West leads AKQ of hearts and you ruff the queen. You draw trumps in three rounds. Can you now claim the contract?
Answer Yes. Cash AKQ of diamonds, lead a club and beat whatever east plays as cheaply as possible. West is now endplayed and must either give a ruff and discard or lead into a club finesse

Question 2

	S AQxx	
	H Jxx	
	D AKQ	
	C xxx	
S10		S Jxx
H AKQ10		H xxxx
D 109xx		D Jxx
C KJ9x		C 10xx
	S K9xxx	
	H 9x	
	D xxx	
	C AQ8	

You are in 4 spades after west opened one heart. West leads AKQ of hearts and you ruff the queen. You draw trumps in three rounds. Can you now claim the contract?
Answer. No. This is the same as the previous hand except that you now have AQ8 instead of AQ9 of clubs. East can prevent the end play by playing the ten. In practice east will often play low and the end play will still work. If east plays low the endplay may also work with, say, AQ7 or AQ6

Question 3

	S QJ9xx	
	H AQ	
	D K103	
	C AKx	
S xx		S 10
H J108xx		H K9xx
D xxxx		D Qxx
C 10x		C J9843
	S AKxxx	
	H 74	
	D AJ2	
	C Qxx	

You are in six spades. West leads a trump. You have eleven top tricks. For the twelfth you have a choice of the heart finesse and two possible diamond finesses. Which should you take?

Answer. None of them. Draw trumps, cash AKQ of clubs and lead AQ of hearts. Whoever wins either has to lead into diamonds, solving the finesse, or give you ruff and discard. The queen of hearts is merely a distraction.

Question 4

	S AJ1097	
	H QJx	
	D AQ42	
	C x	
S xx		S x
H 9xxx		H AK10
D Jx		D 1098x
C AK1082		C Jxxxx
	S KQxxx	
	H xxx	
	D Kxx	
	C Q7	

You are in 4 spades with no opposition bidding. West leads AK of clubs. You ruff the king and draw trumps in two rounds. If diamonds split 3-3 you have ten tricks. What other chance do you have?

Answer. When diamonds fail to split ruff the fourth diamond and lead a low heart. If west plays A or K you have a heart trick. If east wins he is endplayed and must either give a ruff and discard or lead a heart which must give you a heart trick. Note that west can spoil the endplay by leading a heart at trick two when east has safe exit cards.

Question 5

S 10xxx	
H KJxx	
D xx	
C AQx	
S KQx	S ---
H 10x	H Q98x
D AKJ109	D Q8543
C 9xx	C J10xx
S AJ9xxx	
H Axx	
D x	
C Kxx	

You are in four spades. West had overcalled your 1S opening with 2D and leads AK of diamonds. You ruff the king and play the ace of spades but east discards a diamond. You already have three losers and you appear to need the heart finesse to avoid a heart loser as well. Can you improve on this?

Answer. Cash AKQ of clubs. When these stand up you have a count on west's hand. He had three spades, at least three clubs and at least five diamonds (in view of his bid). He can therefore have a maximum of two hearts. You therefore lead AK of hearts and throw west in with a spade. Eventually he has to lead a diamond which gives you a ruff and discard. If west had ruffed one of the clubs and led a heart you could still try the heart finesse.

Question 6

S KJxx	
H Jxx	
D AKx	
C Kxx	
S xx	S xx
H A10x	H Q9xx
D J109x	D Qxx
C QJxx	C 109xx
S AQ9xx	
H Kxx	
D xxx	
C Ax	

You are in 4S with no opposition bidding. West leads the jack of diamonds. You win and draw trumps in two rounds. If the cards are placed badly you may lose three hearts and a diamond. Can you improve on this?

Answer. Cash AK of clubs and ruff your third club. Lead AK of diamonds and a low one. Whoever wins is endplayed. A heart lead will guarantee you one heart trick. Anything other lead gives you a ruff and discard.

Question 7

	S KQxx	
	H 8xx	
	D KJ	
	C AKxx	
S J10		S 9xxx
H QJ10xxx		H---
D xxx		D 1098xx
C 98		C J10xx

S Axx
H AK9x
D AQx
C Qxx

You are in six no trumps. West leads the queen of hearts and east discards a diamond. You have eleven top tricks and need one more. You lead AKQ of spades and clubs to see if either splits 3-3 but east had four of each. You can, however claim your contract. How?

Answer You have a complete count on west's hand. You know he has six hearts, two clubs and two spades and must therefore have three diamonds. You lead AKQ of diamonds and then a low heart. West must play a heart honour and lead into your K8

Question 8

	S xxxx	
	H KJxx	
	D AQx	
	C Kx	
S xx		S AKJ8x
H xx		H xx
D 108xx		D KJx
C Q9xxx		C Jxx
	S Qx	
	H AQ109x	
	D 9xx	
	C A10x	

You are in four hearts after east opened one spade. West leads 10 of spades and east plays AKJ. You ruff the jack high while east discards a club. Trumps split 2-2. Can you be sure of the contract?

Answer Yes. You draw trumps and play AK of clubs followed by a club ruff. You then lead your last spade from dummy. Let east win and discard a diamond from hand (loser on loser). East is now endplayed. He must either lead into AQ of diamonds or give you a ruff and discard.

Question 9

S Qxxx
H Axxx
D Q9x
C Kx

S 9xx
H QJ9
D Axx
C Q8xx

S ----
H 10xxx
D Jxxx
C A109xx

S AKJ10xx
H Kx
D K10x
C Jx

You are in 4 spades with no opposition bidding. West leads the queen of hearts. You win in hand and lead the Ace of spades on which east discards a club. You should have enough tricks if you can finesse the jack of diamonds or if the ace of clubs is with west. Can you improve on this?

Answer Cash the king of spades, lead a heart to the ace and ruff a heart high. Lead a low spade to the queen and ruff your last heart high. Now lead a club. If the opponents win they may cash another club but after that they must either give you a ruff and discard or lead a diamond which solves the finesse. Note the slight risk of a second round heart ruff but you can't draw three trumps immediately because you need the queen as an entry.

Question 10

S K9
H Kxxx
D AJ9x
C AQx

S 8x
H QJ10
D K8xx
C J9xx

S xx
H 98xx
D Qxxx
C K108

S AQJ10xxx
H Ax
D 10
C xxx

You are in six spades and west leads the queen of hearts. You have eleven top tricks. What is the safest way to make a twelfth?

Answer. Win in hand, cash one high trump in hand, cash the king of hearts (slight risk of a ruff), ruff a low heart high in hand, lead a low spade to the king and ruff the last heart. You now need three more tricks. Lead the ten of diamonds and overtake with the jack if west plays low. East is now endplayed and must lead into a finesse in clubs or diamonds. If west plays a diamond honour play the ace and lead the jack of diamonds. You must now make another diamond and the ace of clubs

