

MANAGING TRUMPS

You are probably familiar with the old saying – “There’s many a man walking the embankment because he failed to draw trumps!” Like all such saws, it is only sometimes true. There are as many old bridge players drossing down under the Arches because they drew trumps too early. When playing in a suit contract the first thing you should do is count the certain losers. If you have too many you may not be able to draw the opponents’ trumps before dealing with them, since the most common method of getting rid of excess losers is to ruff them away. If you do not have enough trumps available to do this you may not be able to dispose of them. Here is a basic example of this type of problem...

Example 1

♠ J 6 ♥ Q 6 4 ♦ 7 5 ♣ A 10 9 6 4 2	W	E	♠ K 9 4 ♥ A K J 10 5 ♦ A 10 8 ♣ 8 5
N		E	S
P		1♥ 4♥	W 2♥ All pass

Note that West does not make the grisly mistake of responding with 1NT to his partner’s opening bid. The 1NT response with 6-9 HCP without four-card support for partner’s suit but otherwise virtually regardless of shape seems to be becoming very fashionable. So fashionable that it deserves to be given a name – “The Kamikaze No-Trump” perhaps? East’s 4♥ rebid is distinctly pushy. 3♥ is an accurate description of the value of his hand, trusting partner to judge the hand correctly.

South leads a ♠, won by North with the ♠A. It should be immediately obvious that you will not be able to draw trumps the moment you get in, since you will be left with five inescapable losers if you do (two ♠s, two ♦s and a ♣). You have two methods of disposing of your excess losers. Either you can ruff a ♠ and a ♦ in dummy or you can attempt to set up the long ♣ suit to dispose of the losers from your hand. Both of these strategies demand that you do not draw trumps first.

North cleverly thwarts Plan A by returning a trump at trick two. You can now cash your ♠K and ruff your losing ♠ away, but you will not be able to dispose of your ♦ loser in the same fashion. The opposition

will simply continue trumps when in with their \diamond trick, thus drawing the last crucial trump from the dummy.

You must rely on Plan B and set up the long \clubsuit suit to dispose of the losers in your hand. This plan requires the \clubsuit s to break 3-2, since you do not have enough entries to the table to be able to ruff out the \clubsuit s and then return to cash the established \clubsuit s. Assuming that both the \clubsuit s and the trumps do break kindly, your only remaining concern is to protect the entries to the dummy. At trick two you carefully win the trump switch in hand, preserving the $\heartsuit Q$ as an entry. You then play a low \clubsuit from your hand *and* dummy, thereby keeping the $\clubsuit A$ as the second necessary entry. Now you will win any return other than a \clubsuit in your hand; cash the $\heartsuit A$ to test the trump split and also to ensure that your contract is no more than one down in the event of a 4-1 break in either \clubsuit s or \heartsuit s; cross to the $\clubsuit A$; ruff a \clubsuit high; draw the outstanding trump with the $\heartsuit Q$; run the established \clubsuit s, disposing of two losing \diamond s and the losing \spadesuit .

You will be defeated only if either the \clubsuit s or the trumps break badly and, if so, you can console yourself with the knowledge that you could not have made the contract anyway, provided North switches to a trump at trick two. In the event, Plan B grosses an overtrick.

			\spadesuit	A 10 5 2			
			\heartsuit	8 7 3			
			\diamond	Q 6 2			
			\clubsuit	K J 3			
\spadesuit	J 6		N		E	\spadesuit	K 9 4
\heartsuit	Q 6 4	W				\heartsuit	A K J 10 5
\diamond	7 5		S			\diamond	A 10 8
\clubsuit	A 10 9 6 4 2					\clubsuit	8 5
			\spadesuit	Q 8 7 3			
			\heartsuit	9 2			
			\diamond	K J 9 4 3			
			\clubsuit	Q 7			

Note that if North continues a \spadesuit at trick two, you should still adopt Plan B as your initial approach since there are good chances of gaining an overtrick. You will be able to switch to a \clubsuit at trick three in perfect safety, since you must lose a \clubsuit at some point anyway. North may well choose to play on \diamond s when in with the $\clubsuit J$, hoping that his partner can cash two \diamond s or that declarer will be put to an awkward guess if he holds

♦K J X. If North continues with a third round of ♠s when in with the ♣J, there is no longer any point to Plan B, since ruffing the ♠ means that you can no longer draw the final trump on the table (i.e. the ♠ continuation takes away the second entry). You must revert to Plan A and play a low ♦ from the table and your hand. Now you will be able to ruff away your ♦ loser before drawing trumps.

The play is not at all difficult and yet... the deal came up in a game of rubber and declarer unthinkingly drew a second round of trumps at trick three, *before* appreciating that he would need to set up the ♣ suit. Now, of course, North attacked the last crucial entry by returning the last trump when in with the ♣J. Eventually declarer was forced to concede two down, all because of a momentary carelessness.

There will be occasions when you will be required to play in an uncomfortable 7-card fit, because your combined holding is too powerful not to play in the suit. It pays, however, to know a little bit about the particular odds of likely breaks, since otherwise it is easy to go wrong on these hands. Here is a telling example from a recent duplicate game.

Example 2

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

N	E	S	W
	1♥	2♦	X*
P	3♠	P	4♥
All pass			

*Negative

West's negative double of 2♦ is not good, since he should be able to cope with *any rebid* his partner might make. Although he would not have been expecting the jump rebid in ♠s, he should have realised that this was a possibility and have settled for the more accurate description of 3♣ over the 2♦ overcall. He has two choices over 3♠. He could bid 3NT, which would have been pretty torrid if partner did not hold the ♣A or a ♦ stopper. In the event he chose 4♥, hoping for the best. This was probably correct, although many would vehemently disagree.

South led the ♦J. Declarer ducked in dummy, which was correct in case North held a doubleton honour. A ♦ was continued to North's ♦K and a third round was returned. Declarer considered discarding a low ♠ on this, since South was now virtually certain to be holding the ♠K for his overcall. He recognised however that if the trump suit did not break 3-3 or one opponent held precisely ♥J 8, he would also have a trump to lose and so he could not afford to discard.

Up to this point declarer's analysis was sound, but he now committed a gross aberration and played for the 3-3 trump break after all! He ruffed the third round of ♦s and cashed the three top trumps. On the third round North discarded a small ♠. Declarer obviously could not afford to exit with the last trump now, since South would be able to cash his remaining ♦(s). Instead he switched to the ♣A and played a second round to the ♣K. On the ♣Q declarer discarded a small ♠, but inevitably South ruffed and then forced declarer to use up his last trump on the ♦ return. Declarer now made a forlorn attempt to sneak a small ♠ up to the ♠Q, but South rose with the ♠K and cashed his last ♦ to set the contract by two tricks.

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

There are 64 possible distributions when the defenders hold six cards in a suit. The suit will break 3-3 in only 20 of these distributions, so playing for it is little better than a 31% chance. Provided that the trumps and the ♣s are no worse than 4-2 the contract is laydown, regardless of who actually holds the ♥J – *so long as declarer switches to a low trump after ruffing the third ♦*. No matter which defender actually wins the trick no

return can defeat the contract. A \diamond continuation can be ruffed in dummy and declarer can return to hand with either of the black Aces to draw the remaining trumps, after which he can play on the \clubsuit suit to discard his losing \spadesuit s. On any other return declarer can again draw trumps before switching to the \clubsuit s. It is certainly true that this line will concede the overtrick whenever the trumps break 3-3, but the chances of the trump suit being no worse than 4-2 are better than 78%, which is a dramatic improvement on the paltry 31% chance of the 3-3 break.

Despite the fact that North/South heartily congratulated each other on their good result, their defence was actually pretty poor. North should switch to a \spadesuit when in with the \diamond K, thus ensuring that the defence will take two \diamond s, a \heartsuit and a \spadesuit . As soon as he saw the dummy, North should have realised that there was a good chance that partner held four trumps to one or more honours and that partner was certain to hold five \diamond s for his overcall. Since he is only getting in once, he has only the one chance to establish his partner's \spadesuit trick. If his partner has the \clubsuit A rather than the \spadesuit K, a \spadesuit switch at trick three will not cost. But if partner holds both the \clubsuit A *and* the \spadesuit K without a trump honour, a \spadesuit switch at trick three is crucial.

An additional possibility is that South may well elect to duck the first round of trumps, fearing that his partner could hold a singleton or doubleton honour. If this happens you will make the overtrick, which you will have earned by your fine safety play.

Safety is a primary consideration in any contract you play, of course, but never more so when you are dealing with the possibility of an adverse trump split. The next hand illustrates a very common occurrence that is extremely simple to get right, but it is remarkable how many players will get these situations wrong.

Example 3

\spadesuit 10 9			\spadesuit A K 7 6 4 2
\heartsuit 8 5 4	W	E	\heartsuit A K Q
\diamond 10 9 4			\diamond A 8
\clubsuit K Q J 4 2			\clubsuit 7 6
	N	E	S
	P	2 \spadesuit	P
	P	3 \heartsuit	P
	P	4 \spadesuit	All pass
			W
			2NT
			3 \spadesuit

South led the ♣10 and North encouraged with the ♣9 when declarer covered with the ♣K. Declarer switched to the ♠10 and ran it when North played the ♠3. South won with the ♠Q and returned a second ♣, which North took with the ♣A. A third ♣ was returned. *This is the point where so many players go wrong.* Declarer has already lost two tricks and he must lose a ♦ at some point. He cannot afford to lose any further tricks, but there is clearly a strong indication that South can ruff this third ♣. One possibility is that you could ruff with the ♠7 and hope that South cannot over-ruff. There are two trumps higher than the ♠7 still out so the odds must be that South has at least one of them. Obviously you cannot ruff with the ♠A or ♠K, since even if the ♠J does fall under the master trump, declarer will still lose a second trump to the ♠8.

To ruff at all would be very poor thinking on declarer's part, since he has nothing to gain and everything to lose, even if South is now void in trumps and declarer can safely ruff low. If South started with a singleton ♠Q then North started with ♠J 8 5 3 and declarer will not be able to pick up the ♠J anyway. Declarer must lose a ♦ trick eventually, *so this is the moment.* Discard it. Now the contract cannot be defeated. If South ruffs declarer will be able to draw the remaining trumps, no matter how they break. If South cannot ruff then declarer will have disposed of his losing ♦ on the master ♣ and will only concede one more trump trick to North to secure his contract.

This type of "loser on loser" safety play occurs frequently. Look out for them, since they can often rescue a contract that should not be made. If South leads a ♦ or switches to one when in with the ♠Q, making the contract will rely on the trumps breaking 3-2. This will fail more than 32% of the time, which is not nearly so attractive a proposition as the 100% certainty of the loser-on-loser play.

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

It is often the case that a defender will be blinded by his desire to get a cheap ruff. With the trump holding held by South there was very little point in trying for a ruff since he would almost certainly be ruffing with a trump winner anyway. It is also very poor play to win the ♠10 with the ♠Q. If South had won the trick with the ♠J, North would certainly have appreciated that his partner probably held the ♠Q as well and probably would not want to ruff a third ♣. A switch to either red suit when he is in with the ♣A guarantees that the contract will be defeated, since declarer must eventually concede a second ♠ and a ♦ trick.

More often than not, safety considerations are a question of entries rather than of how to dispose of particular losers. This next hand occurred in a Teams match and declarer managed to go down in a laydown contract, by failing to take account of the number of entries that he would need to succeed.

Example 4

♠	K 9 6 2		♠	A 10 8 5 3																
♥	J 4	W	E	♥	A 7															
♦	K 4			♦	A Q 8 6															
♣	9 7 6 5 3			♣	K 8															
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">W</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 ♠</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2 ♥</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2 ♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">3 ♥</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4 ♠</td> <td style="text-align: center;">All pass</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>							N	E	S	W	P		1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠		3 ♥	4 ♠	All pass	
	N	E	S	W																
P		1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠																
	3 ♥	4 ♠	All pass																	

South led the ♥9. First impressions suggested that there were no serious problems in this contract, provided the trumps were not 4-0. Apparently all declarer needed to do was discard his losing ♥ on the third ♦. If trumps broke 2-2 there would even be an overtrick and if North held the ♣A twelve tricks could be made. So declarer drew two rounds of trumps and.... It was already too late. North showed out on the second round of trumps. Declarer could not continue trumps without conceding a ♥ trick so he played on ♦s. On the third round, South quietly discarded a ♥. Declarer also discarded the ♥ from dummy and then ruffed his ♥ loser. But now he had no convenient entry back to his hand. His last chance was that North held the ♣A, so he played a small ♣ to the ♣K. Inevitably South won with the ♣A, cashed his master ♠ (drawing the last trump from dummy) and then laid down the master ♥. Declarer could

ruff this in hand, naturally, but eventually he had to concede a second ♣ and a ♦.

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

Declarer should have realised that if the trumps did not break, he might well need to ruff a ♦ as well as his ♥ to make the contract. Therefore it is safe to cash the ♠K, but *not* the ♠A, which might be needed as an entry back to hand in order to ruff the losing ♦. The correct line of play is:-

- Win the lead with the ♥A;
- ♠K;
- ♦K;
- ♦A;
- ♦Q, discarding the losing ♥ from dummy;
- Ruff the losing ♥;
- *Trump to the ♠A*;
- Ruff a ♦;
- ♣K, conceding two ♣s and a ♠ when this loses to the ♣A.

It makes no difference if South ruffs either the third or fourth ♦ ahead of dummy. In either case, declarer will simply discard the losing ♥ and he will still be able to ruff out his remaining ♥ loser. Provided South can follow to two rounds and North can follow to three rounds of ♦s the contract cannot be defeated. A small pearl of wisdom:- If you take care of the entries, the contract will usually take care of itself.

A slightly different kind of entry problem is illustrated by the next hand.

Example 5

♠ J 7 2 ♥ 8 7 4 ♦ J 10 3 2 ♣ A Q 9	W	E	♠ A K Q ♥ A Q J 10 6 ♦ A 7 ♣ K 8 4		
	N	E	S	W	
		2♣	P	3♣	
	P	3♥	P	4♥	
	P	4♠	P	5♣	
	P	6♥	All pass		

East/West reach the reasonable contract of 6♥, via a slightly dubious route. 2♦ is a far better response to the opening 2♣, rather than 3♣, waiting for partner to describe his hand. Once West has agreed the ♥ suit, it must also be a better option for East to go through Blackwood or Key-card Blackwood rather than to cue-bid 4♠. Over the response showing one control, he can check for Kings with 5NT – just in case West has both the missing red Kings! As it is he has neither and therefore the contract is by no means solid.

South leads the ♣J. Since there is a certain loser in ♦s, success demands that North should hold the ♥K. If the trumps break 3-2, declarer can pick up the ♥K in three rounds. If the trumps break 4-1, however, declarer will not be able to pick up the ♥K. Unless South has the singleton ♥9, declarer will need to finesse three times and there are only two sure entries to the dummy via the ♣A and ♣Q. The opening lead is fortunate, since it provides an additional chance to cope with the 4-1 trump break. Declarer must go up with the ♣A and drop the ♣K under it! Now he finesses the ♥K and, when the ♥10 holds, he can return to the dummy via a finesse of the ♣10. Provided that North started with at least three ♣s, the ♥K can be finessed three times, if necessary.

Why is it essential to win the opening lead with the ♣A (dropping the ♣K under it) rather than the ♣Q? When the trump finesse works, declarer can still play a small ♣ to the ♣9...? An alert South will foil this plan by covering with the ♣10, thus forcing the ♣A and restricting the entries to two.

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

South is very unlikely to have started with a singleton ♣J and if he did the contract was doomed from the start. A far more serious danger is that he has started a peter from ♣J doubleton. It is remarkable how many players will make such a silly lead against a slam, but in this case it would have worked very well. West was not likely to be impressed by East's explanations after he had lost four tricks (10 of ♣s, ♣ ruff, ♥K and a ♦). If faced with this sort of choice, you will have to assess how strong a player South is. If he is any good at all then he is very unlikely to have led the ♣J from a doubleton. If he is weak then perhaps it is safer to play a small ♣ from your hand on the ♣A, playing for the ♥K to come down in three rounds. At least you will only go one down if the trumps do not behave.

I have some sympathy for South, who does have a difficult choice when selecting the opening lead. He avoided the first pitfall by not leading a trump – the worst possible choice that many players would have made. On the auction East is marked either with a ♦ shortage or alternatively has a strong broken holding such as ♦A Q J or ♦A Q 10. This leaves a choice between the black suits and it is not unreasonable to lead through the known strength. The ♣J is definitely wrong, however. There is too much chance that this will give away the position, if not an immediate trick. A deceptive ♣10 would have been a far better choice.

On rare occasions you may find yourself playing in a contract where you have the tricks available but no communication between the two hands to enable you to cash them (i.e. insufficient entries). This almost always

happens when one hand is far more powerful than the other and is most common of all whenever one player opens a strong 2NT and his partner passes. When this uncomfortable situation arises in a suit contract however, a possible solution is to look at the hand not as an entry problem, but rather as a question of finding a suitable exit card.

This extraordinary hand appeared in a simultaneous event some years ago and my partner (then relatively inexperienced but now acknowledged as first-class) played it brilliantly to bring home the bacon....

Example 6

♠ 5 2 ♥ J 8 2 ♦ K J 10 4 3 ♣ J 6 4	W	E	♠ A Q J 9 8 7 6 3 ♥ A K 5 3 ♦ A ♣ - - - - -	
	N	E	S	W
		2♠	5♣!	P
	P	5♥	6♣	6♠
	All pass			

Sitting West, I was not at all happy bidding 6♠, of course, but I decided that we were extremely unlikely to get a reasonable score by allowing them to play in 6♣. This kind of strategic consideration is typical of duplicate Bridge – at Rubber you would be much more likely to double and take the money. I would have liked to have bid 6♦ rather than 6♠, but I was not at all sure that partner would have understood that this was an invitation to play in either major, depending on whether he had strong preference. I decided that if 6♥ was going to make then 6♠ was likely to make as well and if partner was much longer in ♠s then 6♠ had to be the better slam. To avoid any confusion I bid it directly. This turned out to be a fortunate view, although partner had to be on his toes to make the contract.

As expected, South led the ♣A. North showed out, discarding a ♦! Partner had a long think at this point and eventually decided that if North held any two of the missing trumps or if the ♠K was a singleton then the contract had a good chance, provided that it was played carefully. Take a moment to plan how you would play and see if you can do as well....

Clearly the problem is how to avoid two ♥ losers as well as a certain trump loser if the ♠K was not a singleton. Declarer could cash the ♦A and set up the ♦K for a ♥ discard, but he had no way to reach the

dummy. However, South was marked with a ten-card ♣ suit and therefore held only three cards in the other three suits. There were a number of possibilities. If South held three trumps then clearly the contract could not be made. Declarer was certain to lose one trump and a ♥, regardless of whether South returned a trump or a ♣ when in with the ♠K. After drawing the last trump and cashing the ♦A, declarer would be able to lead towards the ♥8 to hold the ♥ losers to one.

If South held ♠K X the same difficulties arise, of course, except that it might be possible to persuade him to ruff either the ♦A or the ♥A, which would create a possible entry via the ♠5.

If South was void in ♠s (or ♦s) there was a faint possibility of making the contract if South held either a singleton or doubleton ♥Q. If South held ♠10 X and North held the singleton ♠K, then the contract could be made by drawing trumps, cashing the ♦A and then leading a small ♥ to the table and covering whatever South played.

The last remaining possibility was that South held a small singleton ♠ and North held ♠K X. Now the contract could be made unless South held the doubleton ♥Q and declarer guessed wrong. Since there were six ♥s out, North was more likely to hold the ♥Q, particularly if South followed to the first ♠. Assuming all followed to the ♠A, the ♦A could be cashed. If South also followed to the ♦ then the ♥ position could be tested safely by cashing the ♥A before exiting with a second ♠. Declarer took almost as long to think all this out as it's taken to write it, but the important thing was that he got it right!

	♠	K 4			
	♥	Q 10 9 6 4			
	♦	Q 9 8 7 5 2			
	♣	- - - - -			
♠	5 2	N		♠	A Q J 9 8 7 6 3
♥	J 8 2	W	E	♥	A K 5 3
♦	K J 10 4 3	S		♦	A
♣	J 6 4			♣	- - - - -
	♠	10			
	♥	7			
	♦	6			
	♣	A K Q 10 9 8 7 5 3 2			

Declarer started off well by ruffing the opening lead with the ♠9, thus preserving the potential entry of the ♠5. He then laid down the ♠A.

To his credit, North did his best to defeat the contract by parting with the ♠K, hoping that his partner had a trump higher than the ♠5 to keep declarer out of the dummy. Declarer was suspicious of this King, of course, since he could see no reason why South would false-card with the ♠10 from ♠10 4.

As the cards lie, the contract was now cold if declarer cashed the ♦A and crossed to the dummy with the carefully preserved ♠3. He decided that he did not need to take this risk, however, since there was certainly a possibility that South was void in ♦s and would be able to ruff. He cashed a second round of ♠s and laid down the ♦A. When South followed the contract was again unbeatable, even if South could win the low ♥ switch with the singleton ♥Q. He could only return a ♣ for declarer to ruff and now the ♥s would be good. In the event North won the ♥8 with the ♥9 but then he had no good exit.

One important point to note is that if the dummy had held a smaller card than the ♥8 for his second ♥, North's play of the ♠K would have been superb defence if declarer had thoughtlessly ruffed the opening ♣ lead with the ♠3. Now declarer could draw the second round of ♠s, but then would have had no exit card with which to endplay North. Expert players would have automatically ruffed with a card higher than the ♠3, just in case....

Hands played as well as this make your day. Certainly it pleased my partner, who spent the rest of the session floating on cloud nine!

Many players make the mistake of playing too quickly and often this causes them to go down in contracts that they really should have made. This next hand is a classic case of how a momentary lack of attention can lead to defeat.

Example 7

♠	Q 7 3			♠	A 8 5
♥	8 6 5 2	W	E	♥	A K J 9
♦	A			♦	10 8 4
♣	A Q J 5 4			♣	K 10 7
	N	E	S	W	
	P	1♥	P	1♣	
	P	4NT	P	3♥	
	P	6♥	All Pass	5♥	

South led the \diamond K. Declarer was not very happy when he saw the dummy, since he had been expecting at least another King. Still, assuming that the \heartsuit Q could not be successfully finessed or dropped then the contract would seem to depend on ruffing out the two losing \diamond s, since the two losing \spadesuit s could be parked on dummy's long \clubsuit s. At trick two declarer played a small \heartsuit from the dummy and sighed with relief when North put up the \heartsuit Q. Taking the \heartsuit A, he ruffed a \diamond , crossed back to the \clubsuit K and ruffed another \diamond . He then played the last \heartsuit from dummy to his \heartsuit K. North discarded a \diamond and declarer suddenly realised that he still had a trump loser to contend with. He could not afford to draw the remaining trumps, because South would then be able to cash any remaining \diamond s. Therefore he cashed the \heartsuit J and played on \clubsuit s. Naturally South ruffed the third round and exited with a \diamond , which declarer was forced to ruff with the last trump. The best that declarer could hope for now was to go only one down. He switched to a small \spadesuit to the \spadesuit Q, but inevitably North showed up with the \spadesuit K and so the defence took a second \spadesuit to defeat the contract by two tricks.

East attempted to blame West for the failure, claiming that he was not strong enough for his $3\heartsuit$ rebid. West was having none of it, pointing out that on the lead the contract was laydown, provided that South has at least a singleton in both \clubsuit s and \spadesuit s. In my opinion, East was right when he stated that West's $3\heartsuit$ was an overbid, although I would agree that the decision is not clear cut by any means. West's statement that the contract should have been made was correct. Do you see why?

	\spadesuit		K 10 6 4
	\heartsuit		Q
	\diamond		9 7 6 3 2
	\clubsuit		9 8 3
\spadesuit	Q 7 3	N	\spadesuit
\heartsuit	8 6 5 2	W	E
\diamond	A	S	\spadesuit
\clubsuit	A Q J 5 4		\spadesuit
			A 8 5
			\heartsuit
			A K J 9
			\diamond
			10 8 4
			\clubsuit
			K 10 7
	\spadesuit		J 9 2
	\heartsuit		10 7 4 3
	\diamond		K Q J 5
	\clubsuit		6 2

After winning the ♦A, declarer switched to a low ♥. When North unexpectedly played the ♥Q on the first round, declarer should have stopped to consider the ramifications. Almost certainly the ♥Q was a singleton, in which case South held four to the ♥10 *and declarer was still bound to lose a trump*. Therefore he could not afford a ♠ loser as well. Since he could not ruff these ♠ losers away, his only chance of disposing of them was to park them on the long ♣s. If he could ruff his two ♦ losers in dummy before drawing the remaining trumps then he would have disposed of all of his losers apart from the inevitable trump.

Therefore he should simply duck the ♥Q. North cannot make a damaging return unless his partner is void in ♣s or ♠s (in which case the contract cannot be made anyway, since declarer needs both of the black suit entries to his hand). By ducking the first round of trumps, declarer would have regained control of the trump suit and could have drawn them when he was ready to, without running the risk of being forced by a fourth round of ♦s. The play should have gone:-

- Win the ♦ lead in dummy;
- *Duck the Queen of trumps;*
- Win a ♠ or ♣ switch in hand;
- Ruff a ♦;
- Cross to the ♥A, confirming the 4-1 break;
- Ruff the last ♦;
- Cross to the ♠A or the ♣K, depending on North's switch at trick three;
- Draw trumps;
- Cash four more rounds of ♣s, discarding the two ♠ losers from hand.

Note that the alternative line of winning the first trump, ruffing a ♦ and then ducking a ♥ round to South's ♥10 does not work. South will simply exit with a ♥, drawing the last trump from the table. Although declarer will now be able to park two of his losers on the long ♣ suit, he will still be left with a loser after he returns to hand with the ♠A.

Whenever something unexpected occurs, always stop to consider what it tells you about the shape and/or strength in the opponent's hand. If North had held a second ♥ and was simply playing a deceptive ♥Q on the first round, there would still have been no threat to the contract. Declarer could still ruff out his two losing ♦s before drawing the remaining trumps, even if North had continued trumps at trick three. The problem on the hand was that the declarer was in too much of a hurry to ruff. He failed to consider the possibility that the singleton ♥Q might

actually be good news! In principle, declarer was faced with a similar situation to that encountered in **Example 2** – in order to retain control of the trump suit it is sometimes necessary to concede an early trump trick. Control is the name of the game on hands like these.

Many players also seem to have great difficulty in discerning which of their cards are losers....

Example 8

<p>♠ A 6 5 2 ♥ K 8 ♦ K 6 5 3 2 ♣ 9 5</p>	W		E	<p>♠ K 4 ♥ A 10 9 6 5 2 ♦ 9 ♣ A K 4 3</p>	
	N		E	S	W
			1♥	P	2♦
	P		3♥	P	4♥
	All pass				

South leads the ♠J. The contract apparently relies on the 3-2 ♥ break, so long as North holds at least three ♣s. Declarer can trump the third round of ♣s; cash the ♥K; return to hand with a ♠ and cash the ♥A. As long as the trumps are 3-2, declarer will concede one ♥, one ♦ and one ♣ for his contract.

In fact the contract can be made even when the trumps break 4-1, provided declarer looks at his losers in a different light. He should plan to lose one ♦ and *two trumps*. In other words he should simply set out to ruff both losing ♣s, but in such a way that if North can over-ruff he does so with a trump winner. This line also has the advantage of needing North to hold only a doubleton ♣, which is a distinct improvement. Declarer is playing to make his contract with North holding 2-4-5-2 shape or even 2-5-4-2 shape, holding both the ♦A and the ♥Q J in both distributions. Alternatively, he will still make his contract if South holds ♥Q J X X of trumps. Since a more favourable distribution does no more than improve the chances for an overtrick, this must be the correct way to play the hand. The actual deal was as follows:-

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

Declarer ran the ♠J lead round to his ♠K. North could have given him a few anxious moments by playing the ♠Q on the first round of the suit, but he actually played the ♠8. Declarer then cashed the ♠A, followed by the ♣A K. *He ruffed the third ♣ with the ♥K*, on which North discarded a ♦. He returned to hand with a ♠ ruff and again North discarded a ♦. At this point declarer was fairly sure that North had started with at least four trumps, but he knew that even if they were 5-0 he could not be defeated. He led out his last ♣ and ruffed with the ♥8. North could have over-ruffed, of course, but only with a trump winner. In the event he decided to discard yet another ♦. Declarer returned to hand via a ♠ ruff and North discarded the ♦Q. Declarer then laid down the ♥A for the ninth trick, felling South's singleton ♥J and exited with a ♦ to North's ♦A. North made a forlorn attempt to fool declarer into end-playing himself by exiting with the ♥4 of trumps, but declarer simply covered with the ♥6 to make his overtrick.

The key point to recognise about this hand is the value of the ♥8 in the dummy. If North had held the ♥8 and dummy the ♥7, the line was less likely to succeed. With the fortunate lie of the cards the 4♥ game cannot be defeated, but if North had held ♥Q J 7 X, attempting to draw them would have left declarer with at least four losers (two ♣s, a ♦ and a ♥) even assuming he had made the safety play of running the ♥8 if North had played low. If declarer had ruffed the third round of ♣s with the ♥8 and North had held ♥Q J 7 X, he could have over-ruffed and simply exited with a low trump to the ♥K. Eventually declarer would have had to concede another ♥, a ♦ and a ♣ to go one down.

Whenever you can find a safe line to make your contract that copes with adverse breaks, always play for it. It may occasionally cost you an overtrick to play for bad breaks – it will frequently cost you your contract if you do not.

The next hand is another telling example of the importance of recognising what your losers are likely to be.

Example 9

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

	N	E	S	W
	P	1♣	P	1♦
	P	1♠	P	2♠
	P	3♠	P	4♠
	All pass			

West was pleased to accept the invitation to game, since he knew that 2♠ might well be a necessary underbid on his shape. South led the ♠2, followed by the ♠6 from dummy and the ♠5 from North. Take a moment to plan the play before reading on....

South is virtually certain to be holding all the remaining trumps since he is unlikely to have led a singleton and North is unlikely to have ducked holding ♠K X or ♠A X. If this is the case, declarer cannot afford to draw any more trumps until the losers have been dealt with because South will be only too happy to comply. This will leave two ♣s and a ♦ loser, only one of which can be discarded on the long ♥.

Why did South did not simply draw three rounds of trumps from the beginning? The answer is that declarer would now have ten tricks by simply ruffing a ♣ before drawing the last trump (two ♠s, four ♥s, one ♦, two ♣s and a ♣ ruff). By underleading his ♠A K, South is retaining control of the trump suit. So why not simply ruff one ♣ before forcing out the trumps? Does this not simply revert to the previous result? No. This line fails because South will no longer oblige by playing three rounds of trumps. Instead he will switch to a ♦ when in with the second trump. It does not matter whether declarer wins the first or second ♦, South will simply continue ♦s when in with the third round of trumps, forcing declarer to ruff in hand leaving South with the last trump. The

defence will then be able to claim either another \spadesuit or another \clubsuit to set the contract by one trick.

Whenever it is the opposition who have control of the trump suit and there is little chance to wrest it from them, the only recourse is to attempt to control all the outside suits. On this hand that is not difficult, since declarer has at least first-round control in all three suits. Therefore the play should go as follows:-

- Win the trump lead in hand;
- *Ruff a small \clubsuit* ;
- Return to the \heartsuit A;
- *Ruff a second small \clubsuit* ;

At this point the temptation is to exit with the \spadesuit 10, but this would be an error if South started with long \spadesuit s, since declarer could still be forced into making an inconvenient ruff in hand. What declarer should be doing is attempting to lose three trump tricks but no tricks at all in the outside suits. So he should continue with a \heartsuit to the \heartsuit Q. If this is not ruffed he is home free. He can continue cashing \heartsuit s. It does not matter if either defender ruffs in now – they are merely winning the trick declarer is allowing them to make. Now the losing \spadesuit is discarded on the long \heartsuit , with the \spadesuit A as the entry to the table.

		\spadesuit	5			
		\heartsuit	10 9 8 4			
		\diamond	Q 9			
		\clubsuit	Q 10 8 5 4 3			
\spadesuit	10 8 7 6		N		\spadesuit	Q J 9 3
\heartsuit	K J 6 5	W		E	\heartsuit	A Q 2
\diamond	A 8 7 5 2		S		\diamond	10 6
\clubsuit	-----				\clubsuit	A K 7 6
		\spadesuit	A K 4 2			
		\heartsuit	7 3			
		\diamond	K J 4 2			
		\clubsuit	J 9 2			

In retrospect the hand is quite simple, but an awful lot of players would have gone down on the lead. Can the contract be defeated on a \spadesuit lead, perhaps? Declarer must be very careful now since he can no longer afford to lose three trump tricks. Clearly declarer must duck the first \spadesuit .

The two main variations depend on whether North continues ♦s or whether he returns a trump for his partner to draw three rounds.

If North returns a ♦ (or anything other than a trump) declarer should win the ♦A and ruff a third ♦ immediately. He should then cross to the ♥J and ruff the fourth ♦. Then he should cash the ♣A K, discarding two small ♥s, overtake the ♥Q with the ♥K and ruff his last ♦ with the ♠Q. South is helpless.

If North returns a trump and South does not draw three rounds, the play reverts to the line outlined above. If South does draw three rounds, declarer makes his contract via a ♣ ruff before drawing the outstanding trump. In other words the hand reverts to the same solution as if South had led out three rounds of trumps.

The next technique to be examined is that known as ‘Trump Reduction’. More often than not, the necessity for this line of play becomes apparent as a result of the auction.

Example 10

♠	A J		♠	K Q 8 7	
♥	K 9 8 6 4 3	W	E	♥	J 2
♦	8 7			♦	A Q 10 9 4 2
♣	A K 7			♣	9
	N	E	S	W	
				1♥	
	P	2♦	3♣!	3♥	
	P	3♠	P	4♦	
	P	4NT	P	5♥	
	P	6♦	P	P	
	X	All pass			

South led the ♣J. As soon as declarer saw the dummy he realised that South must have made a daft pre-emptive overcall. This was no great surprise since past experience had taught him that South’s bidding style often veered towards the idiotic. Pre-emptive bids are a gamble and should only be made when there is a reasonable chance that it will not be too expensive. When one opponent has opened the bidding and the other has shown good values by bidding a new suit at the 2-level, overcalling with a weak six or seven-card suit is ridiculous. Some players do seem to find it difficult to understand that “Pass” is often the most accurate description of the strength of their hand.

West should not have rebid his ♥s over 3♣. Although the length of the suit was adequate, the strength left a lot to be desired. 3NT is a much better description of the strength of the hand, as it would have been over partner's 3♠. East/West were very lucky to be playing in 6♦ rather than 6♥, which obviously had no play.

At this point it was not certain whether North's double was based on ♥s or trumps (or both). Given South's overcall it was more likely to be based upon a strong trump holding (♦K J X X (X)) with the reasonable expectation that partner would provide at least one trick. If North did hold long trumps then there was a good chance to make the slam. There was one certain loser in ♥s, however, so declarer needed South to hold at least one trump for the contract to make, since otherwise the timing of the hand was wrong. The ♣ lead had removed an entry from the table, so it was necessary also that the ♥s should break 3-2 as there were only two entries left.

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

The aim on these types of hands should be to reduce the length of the trump suit to the same length as the defender who is holding the outstanding trumps. At the same time the other hand must be set up with enough winners to discard *all* of the other cards in your hand (including other winners). This is not easy to do and the timing of the hand is paramount.

The opening lead of a low ♥ would have given the declarer a very awkward guess, but the ♣ lead resolved the problem. Declarer won the ♣A and cashed the ♣K, discarding a ♥ from his hand. At trick three he played the ♦8 and ran it when North played low. A second trump was

covered by the \heartsuit J and taken by the \heartsuit Q, while South discarded a \clubsuit . Declarer's next priority was to set up the \heartsuit suit, so he led out the \heartsuit J. South had to win this or concede the overtrick. Declarer ruffed the \clubsuit continuation and crossed to the \spadesuit J. He then ruffed a small \heartsuit in hand and crossed back to the dummy with the \spadesuit A. Since both defenders followed to the second round of \heartsuit s, declarer was now home and dry. He led out the \heartsuit K and discarded a \spadesuit when North followed. He then led out another round of \heartsuit s and North was helpless. If he discarded, declarer would discard his last \spadesuit . If he ruffed (correct, just in case declarer does not hold the \spadesuit K) declarer would over-ruff and draw the last trump. The \spadesuit K would provide his twelfth trick.

This is a relatively straightforward example of the trump reduction technique. There are many weird and wonderful variations, but they all have the same basic requirements for them to succeed.

1. The defender with the long trumps must be sitting to the right of the hand with long trumps.
2. The hand opposite must have enough winners to dispose of all of the cards outside of the trump suit.
3. The hand opposite must have enough entries to (a) finesse trumps as many times as possible and (b) dispose of all the excess trumps by ruffing and (c) return to this hand once the first two conditions have been met.

If all of these conditions cannot be fulfilled, a trump reduction will not work. If West had held \spadesuit A X rather than \spadesuit A J, for example, declarer would have been unable to return to the table after ruffing the second \heartsuit . Effectively, at the point that the trump reduction play succeeds you are taking the marked finesse in trumps, without having a trump to lead.

There remains one final technique to examine, known as 'Dummy Reversal'.

Example 11

\spadesuit Q 10 3			\spadesuit A K J 9 8 2
\heartsuit Q 9	W	E	\heartsuit A K 10 4
\diamondsuit 9 4 2			\diamondsuit K 8
\clubsuit A Q 9 8 2			\clubsuit 3

N	E	S	W
	1♠	P	2♣
P	3♥	P	4♠
P	4NT	P	5♦
P	6♠	All pass	

South led the ♣4. At first sight the contract seemed to rely either on North holding the ♦A or on South holding the ♣K. Another possibility was that the ♥J would come down in three rounds, in which case declarer could discard two of dummy's ♦s on the long ♥s. The first two options both had a 50% chance of success, while the third had considerably less, since it also required the trumps to break 2-2 so that there would be a trump left in dummy to ruff the second ♦ from hand.

A far better option was to play the hand on dummy reversal lines. Dummy reversal means that losers are ruffed in the *long trump hand*, before using the trumps in the short hand (usually dummy, but not always in these days of transfer bids) to draw the outstanding trumps. The object is to establish a long side suit in the short trump hand and use those trumps to gain access. To succeed certain conditions must be met.

1. The trumps in the short hand must be strong enough to draw the outstanding trumps.
2. The hand with the short trumps must have a second suit that can be established.
3. The hand with the long trumps must be able to ruff all the losers in this second suit.

This hand fulfilled all the requirements, provided that the trumps were no worse than 3-1. Dummy held the ♠Q and ♠10, which would be enough to draw the outstanding trumps. The dummy had a long suit which could be established (i.e. ♣s) and all of the ♣ losers could be ruffed in hand. If the ♣King came down in no more than four rounds, the ♣Q would have been established to discard one (and possibly both) of the losing ♦s from hand.

Declarer would have lost nothing if the ♣s had broken 5-2 and the ♣K had not appeared in two rounds, since he would still have the chance that North held the ♦A, or that the ♥J would fall within three rounds with the trumps breaking 2-2. Essentially what he was doing by playing this way was to keep as many of his options open as he could, which was certainly preferable to a 50-50 guess.

Thus the ♣A was taken and a ♣ ruffed high (just in case they were 6-1). After crossing to the ♠10 a second ♣ was ruffed high. If the ♣K

had not appeared, declarer would cross to the ♠Q (confirming the trump position) and ruff out the ♣K. After crossing to the ♥Q any outstanding trump would be drawn and the ♣Q cashed, discarding the losing ♦. If the trumps broke 3-1 declarer would still need to drop the ♥J in three rounds, but otherwise he was home.

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

As the cards lie, playing for the ♥J to fall in three rounds would not have worked. As the trumps broke kindly, however, declarer was able to ruff his losing ♥ before conceding a ♦. Given declarer's good plan of campaign he was unlucky not to make all thirteen tricks.

The theme common to all the hands illustrated in this chapter is that it can be fatal to draw trumps too early. Certainly there will be many hands where the first imperative is to draw trumps as quickly as possible. You will be pulling the opponents' teeth before they can bite you. Just be sure that it is their teeth that you are pulling and not your own!

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