

Safety Plays

Sometimes suits give declarer a dilemma. Or, to put it another way, there is a risk in playing them. Consider the declarer and dummy here.

♠ 4 3 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ A K Q 3 2
♣ 3 2
<u>Dummy</u>

There are seven diamonds between the two hands. The defence have six, and the statistics say that six will split 4:2.

♠ K Q 6
♥ K Q 10 8
♦ 8 7
♣ A K 8 7
<u>Declarer</u>

The four card suit could easily be headed by the J, 10 or 9.

There are no entries outside the diamonds in dummy, and only two diamonds in declarer.

If the Diamonds split badly you will only make three diamond tricks. By choosing to lose the first diamond trick, you make four tricks in Diamonds certain.

This is a classic safety play. It's especially attractive in teams competition where making the contract is crucial. In pairs, however, where the overtrick can be so important, some players may take the risk on the split. Annoyingly some players will cash the diamonds from the top without thinking about it, find a favourable split, and make an extra trick. Grrrr!

Safety Plays in single suit holdings

Often the way a single suit is played will depend on how many tricks you need from that suit. With the following combination, if you need four tricks from the suit, you need to cash the K and finesse the J, hoping for a 3-3 split and West holding the Q.

North

♠ A J 3 2

South

♠ K 5 4

If you only need three tricks from the suit, the safety play is to cash the A & K then lead low towards the J. This deals with all doubletons containing the Q.

With the following combination, if you can afford to lose one trick in the suit you can guard against any 4-0 split by leading the ♠2 from hand and covering whatever West plays.

North

♠ A 10 9 4

South

♠ K 8 7 3 2

There are many other safety plays for other suit combinations. Be wary though of indulging in safety plays in the trump suit if the defenders are threatening to ruff another suit - it may be best to take out trumps ASAP.

In pairs getting just one trick in front of the field gives you that top, so you may neglect safety plays for the chance of the extra trick. In teams, bidding and making the game contracts is most important, so you may choose the safety play to guarantee making the game contract.