

IN THE last edition we saw how your handling of suit combinations had to be in the context of the whole hand. This time we look at two factors which must override the theoretically correct way of playing a suit.

In hand (a) you are in 3NT and North leads the ♥5 to South's ♥J. How do you proceed?

(a)

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

You have a sure route to success provided the diamonds don't break 4-0, taking two spades, a heart, four diamonds and two clubs. You have to realise that if you win the first heart trick with the ♥K you are in danger only if South wins a diamond trick, because North cannot successfully attack your heart holding. We say that North is the 'safe hand', and we plan the play in such a way that if we have to lose a diamond trick it is North who wins it. The theoretically correct way to play the diamonds in isolation from the whole hand is to play for the drop, but that is irrelevant here. You should cross to dummy's ♦K and lead the ♦2, inserting your ♦J if South follows with a low card.

In example (b) you are in 4♠ and North leads the ♠K. What is your best chance of success?

(b)

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

This time the odds heavily favour playing out three top spades, hoping for a 3-2 division. However that could go badly wrong if South started with ♠J x x x. Your contract would then be in danger if he could ruff the second diamond and switch to hearts.

North is the safe hand, so you should be prepared play the spades against the odds in order to prevent South from gaining the lead. Your insurance policy, which practically guarantees your contract, is to win with the ♠A and finesse your ♠10.

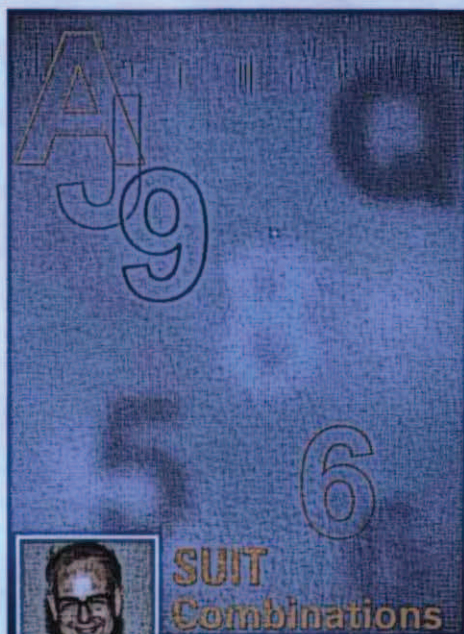
In example (c) you are in 5♦ and North leads the ♥A which you ruff. How should you tackle the trump suit?

(c)

♠ K 2	♠ 9 3
♥ None	♥ J 8 5 4 3
♦ A K J 9 8 7	♦ 10 6 2
♣ A K 7 4 3	♣ Q J 6

Firstly cash the ♦A. Hopefully both defenders follow suit. Now enter dummy with the ♣Q and lead a low diamond.

If South shows out rise with the ♦K and start playing clubs. North can ruff in when he chooses but he cannot attack spades, or prevent you from discarding dummy's spades on your clubs and ruffing a spade in dummy.



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### A series to help you improve your card play

Alternatively, if South follows with a low diamond insert your ♦J. Even if this loses to the doubleton ♦Q x your contract is secure.

In example (d) you are in 3NT after North opened 3♠. North leads the ♠K and South plays the ♠2, an obvious singleton. You win with the ♠A. What next?

(d)

♠ A 9 5	♠ 7 4
♥ A K	♥ 9 8 4
♦ 7 4 3	♦ A K 8 2
♣ A K 4 3 2	♣ 8 7 6 5

One spade trick, two hearts, two diamonds and four clubs will suffice provided North is kept off the lead. It hardly seems possible that the club suit is capable of consideration as a 'suit combination', but you must play it to keep North off the lead. Enter dummy with the ♦A and lead the ♣5.

If South plays the ♣Q allow him to hold the trick, otherwise rise with your ♠A and continue with the ♠K and a third club, hoping North cannot win the trick.

Can you see why it was necessary to win the first spade? If you duck the ♠K North will persist with the ♠Q and an alert South will discard his singleton ♠Q, creating a club entry for North.

In example (e) you are in 6♠. North leads the ♥7. Can you ensure your contract against all but the most improbable distributions?

(e)

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

This time you are going to ignore the (very marginal) odds in favour of playing spades for the drop in order to profit from

an endplay if you do have to lose a trump trick. Win the heart lead in your hand with the ♥A, cash the ♠K, ♠A, ♦K and ♦A, and lead the ♠Q.

If North shows out rise with dummy's ♠A and endplay South with the ♠K.

If North follows suit with the ♠6 play low from dummy. If South wins the trick with the singleton ♠K he has to lead from his ♥Q or give a ruff and discard.

In hand (f) your contract is 4♠ and North leads the ♦Q. Can you ensure your contract?

(f)

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

Win the ♦K, draw trumps, cash your red suit winners (eliminating the red suits) and turn your attention to clubs. If you were in a No Trump contract aiming for maximum tricks in clubs you would cash the ♠A K and lead a low club towards dummy's ♠J. Here you can guarantee the three club tricks necessary for your contract by cashing just the ♠A and leading a low club.

If North follows with a low club play dummy's ♠J. If it loses to South's ♠Q the suit is breaking 3-2. Alternatively, if North shows out play a low club from dummy. South wins cheaply but is end-played, forced to lead from his ♠Q or give a ruff and discard.

Finally, in hand (g) you are in 6♥, North leading the ♠J. You win and consider the trump suit. If South started with ♥A 10 8 7 you can pick up the suit provided you start with the ♥K, so you lead a heart towards dummy, the ♥K winning but South showing out. It seems that North has two sure trump tricks, but all is not lost yet. Can you give yourself a chance? If you want a hint: you need North's shape to be 3-4-3-3.

(g)

♠ A K 8	♠ Q 3 2
♥ Q 9 6 5 4	♥ K J 3 2
♦ A K Q	♦ 8 5 4
♣ K 8	♣ A 4 2

Continue by cashing your ♠K, enter dummy with the ♠A and ruff a club. Now cash all your spades and diamonds leaving the position as follows:

♥ A 10 8		
♥ Q 9 6	♠ J 3 2	

Immaterial

Can you now handle this heart suit combination for just one loser? Play the ♥Q!

If North withholds the ♥A you can lead up to dummy's ♥J for your twelfth trick.

Alternatively, if North takes the ♥A he is end-played, forced to lead away from his remaining ♥10 8.