



Timing: What to Do First

THIS SET of articles is looking at declarer counting winners and losers in a suit contract. Often enough, in a trump contract, there are two major strategies for declarer: either draw trumps immediately or, alternatively, look to ruff losers in the dummy. The basic principle is that if there are enough winners for the contract, then declarer should aim to draw trumps. If there aren't enough winners but the losers aren't too plentiful, then declarer should aim to ruff his loser(s) in the dummy. Easy enough? If only life were so simple . . . !

On some deals there are too many losers, even though there may be sufficient winners. Let's start with a simple deal:

Deal 1
 South plays in 4♠.
 West leads the ♥2.

♠ 10 2
 ♥ A K 4
 ♦ A K Q J
 ♣ J 5 3 2



♠ K Q J 9 8 3
 ♥ Q 9 6
 ♦ 5
 ♣ 10 8 6

Well, West has found a poor opening lead as this deal has four top losers (three clubs and the ace of spades.) However, there are five spade winners, three heart winners and four diamonds as well. Four losers and twelve winners. Hmmm, that does not compute. Now, on many occasions having twelve winners means that the best play for declarer is to draw trumps. However, in this case playing a spade at trick two would be poor play – can you see why?

Declarer can eliminate his losing clubs by ditching them on the diamonds. If

South leads trumps immediately, though, the opposition might wake up by winning the ace of spades and switching to clubs. Declarer has to leave trumps well alone and throw clubs away as soon as he can. So, best play is to win the heart lead and immediately play off the top diamonds, all of them. Sometimes the diamonds will be 4-4 and South will only lose a trick to the ace of spades. Sometimes the diamonds will be 5-3, in which case someone will ruff the fourth round. No matter, declarer can still pitch a club. Now South will lose a trick to a low trump, it is true, but his only other loser is the ace of spades.



On some deals it is dummy's losers that have to be thrown. A count of losers on Deal 2 shows there to be four (three clubs and a spade). What about a count of winners?

Deal 2
 South plays in 4♠.
 West leads the ♥1.

♠ 10 5 3 2
 ♥ 7 6
 ♦ A J 7 6
 ♣ J 9 7



♠ K Q J 8 6 4
 ♥ A K Q
 ♦ 5
 ♣ 10 8 6

Counting winners South can see five spades, three hearts and a diamond. Is there a tenth trick? As in Deal 1, if declarer attacks trumps prematurely he will be defeated (assuming East-West switch to clubs). South must play off three top

hearts, pitching a club away from the dummy. Now declarer can play on trumps and eventually, having conceded two clubs, he can ruff his last club in the dummy. The ten required winners are five spades, three hearts, a diamond and a club ruff in the dummy.



This idea of discarding losers before playing trumps can be extended to include tempo deals. Try this one, played in this article's usual contract of 4♠, this time against the lead of the diamond king:

Deal 3
 South plays in 4♠.
 West leads the ♦K.

♠ Q 10 8 3
 ♥ A Q 5
 ♦ 10 8 6
 ♣ Q J 10



♠ K J 9 7 5
 ♥ K 8
 ♦ A 5 3
 ♣ K 9 8

Let's count winners and losers. Firstly winners: four spades, three hearts, one diamond and two clubs. That makes ten. Now losers: South has one spade, no hearts, two diamonds and a club. That makes four losers.

If declarer attempts to draw trumps immediately he will suffer defeat on this deal: the opponents will take the ace of spades, cash two diamonds and wait for the ace of clubs. The king of diamonds lead has given the defence the tempo by knocking out the ace of diamonds early, giving the defenders four top tricks. The solution? Throw away a loser on a heart

winner before playing trumps. Declarer's first manoeuvre must be to play three rounds of hearts throwing away a losing diamond (taking care not to block the heart suit). After this declarer is safe to play on trumps to knock out the ace of spades and draw all the trumps.

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Deal 4 is a variation on this theme of tempo, where each side is racing to get its tricks set up. How should South play in a contract of 4♠ against the lead of the queen of diamonds?

Deal 4
South plays in 4♠.
West leads the ♠Q.

♠ 10 6 4 3
♥ K Q J
♦ A K 5
♣ 10 8 4

♠ K Q J 9 5
♥ 4 3
♦ 8 7 4
♣ K Q J

Now, there are three obvious losers with the three missing aces and there is a diamond to lose as well. What can declarer do? Well, count the winners. There are four spades, two hearts, two diamonds and two clubs. Hmm, four losers, ten winners, the same as in Deal 3. This may suggest that we can set up a trick somewhere for a discard. How should South play?

Well, there is only one successful line. Declarer must win the diamond lead and immediately play a heart. If the opponents win to play another diamond South wins that in the dummy, cashes the top hearts, throwing a diamond, and then, *and only then*, turns his attention to trumps. The important point to note about this deal is that a discard on the hearts is useless later in the play. It will do you no good at all to throw a club away on a heart. The opponents have the tempo with their diamond lead, you must set your heart tricks up

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rapidly (for a diamond discard) to counter this.

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This article ends with a more subtle version of Deal 4:

Deal 5
South plays in 4♠.
West leads the ♠Q.

♠ 10 6 4 3
♥ Q 10 4
♦ K 8 5
♣ J 9 2

♠ K Q J 9 5
♥ K J
♦ A 7 4
♣ K Q 8

Again, there are three obvious losers in three aces and, again, you have a diamond to lose. Counting winners and losers gives the same answer as in Deal 4: there are four losers and ten winners. What makes this deal trickier than the last is the position regarding entries. How should the play go?

The correct line of play has to be precise. Win the diamond lead with the ace of diamonds (winning with dummy's diamond king is no good) and immediately play the king of hearts. If the opponents win to play another diamond, South wins that with the king of diamonds, cashes the top hearts, throwing a diamond, and then, *and only then*, turns his attention to the drawing of trumps.

Why is winning trick one in the dummy the wrong play? Well, imagine that the first trick is won there with the king of diamonds and the next card is a heart to declarer's king of hearts, which wins the trick (no one says the opponents have to take their ace of hearts). Now South plays another heart, which loses, and back comes another diamond. Now what? If you have followed the play carefully you will see that the lead is in the South hand and the heart winner is stranded in the North hand. Declarer has to be careful (*very careful*) with his use of entries on this deal.

As a final coda to this deal – can you see the importance of the ten of hearts? Without it (imagine North's hearts were ♥Q-5-4 instead of ♥Q-10-4), 4♠ could be defeated. Can you see *how*? □

CAPTION COMPETITION



Don't call me dummy, fathead!

THE winner of our October competition, with the caption above, is Dave Bryan of Upton, Chester, who will receive an elegant bridge mug from our sponsors, Bridge and Golf Gifts Direct (see page 15). Other excellent captions were: *I'm reporting you to the Ethics Sub-committee!* (David Richardson, Boston Spa); *Psyche once more and you'll find out who's vulnerable!* (Frank Fallon, Charminster); *Aggressive bidders* (Malcolm Cloutt, Princes Risborough); *If you mention "diamonds", "your honour" and "going down" once again . . .* (Mike Wood, Staplecross); *Don't you dare pre-empt me!* (Pat Hore, Selsdon); *In this cell, 2NT is Baron, never Jacoby!* (Peter Lunoe, Hemel Hempstead); *What do you mean, "Double cross"? Say "Redouble"!* (John Stacey, Bury St. Edmunds); and *Shut it! I will not pay to play!* (Sally Izod, Cheltenham).

The cartoon for our new competition is below. Please send your bridgy captions (multiple entries accepted) to the Editor, *English Bridge*, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR or by e-mail to elena@ebu.co.uk not later than 19th December 2012. **Don't forget to include your full postal address!**



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