



Making Use of the Trump Suit

THIS SERIES of articles has looked at the play of the cards in a trump contract. When dummy goes down you must stop and think (only lunatics and geniuses play quickly to trick one) and what you should be doing during this period of cogitation is counting. Counting losers, counting winners and, of course, counting trumps. So far we have looked at hands where we draw trumps immediately and hands where we need to ruff losers in the dummy (so we delay the drawing of trumps). In the last article there was a series of hands where we postponed drawing trumps until we had discarded our losers. This article is concerned with another category of hands – those where we use the trump suit to ruff out a suit.

Now, we need to be clear here. Crystal clear. In general terms it is (very) poor play to ruff in the long trump hand. In the deal below you can see a very common error:

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

♠ Q 10 4
 ♥ A 7 6
 ♦ Q 10 3
 ♣ 9 6 3 2

♠ K J 9 7 5
 ♥ J
 ♦ K J 9 8
 ♣ A K 7

diamond loser and a (slow) club loser. Winners? There are four spades, one heart, three diamonds and two clubs. So altogether there are three losers and ten winners. In these cases it is (almost always) right to draw trumps. Why am I wasting your time on such a trivial hand? Because many players (make that: far too many players) win the heart ace at trick one and ruff a heart at trick two, with an air of achievement. Ruffing in the 'long hand' is rarely right: all you do is weaken your trump suit, and here you will now be in danger if spades break 4-1. Note that a heart ruff gains you nothing: South has four spade tricks in any case and ruffing a heart gains precisely no extra tricks.



On the next deal, however, ruffing in the long hand is the right play – and it is important to see the essential difference between Deal 1 and Deal 2.

Deal 2
 South plays in 4♥.
 West leads the ♣A-K
 and plays the ♦5.

♠ A K 7 6 2
 ♥ Q J 9
 ♦ 8 4 3
 ♣ Q 3

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

Let's go back to basics. Count losers – there is a certain spade loser, a certain

(I got fed up with every hand being played in 4♠, so now the trump suit is hearts). West cashes two top clubs and switches to a diamond. Count – plan – execute.

Winners? Two spades, six hearts and a diamond – making nine. Losers? No spades, no hearts, two diamonds and two clubs – making four. So then, we have nine winners and four losers. Where is the tenth trick going to come from?

Now, you may draw trumps if you wish but really you shouldn't do that unless you can 'see' your contract, and here you can't. Incidentally, I was struck recently by a remark made by a top American player who reckoned that, in trump contracts, he drew trumps as his first play about 40% of the time. On 60% of hands there was something else to do first. Interesting . . . Anyway, back to the plot in 4♥. Obviously, you can play off the ♠A-K and ruff a spade. But why should you do that? It certainly doesn't give you any more than the six heart tricks that you had to start with. The answer is that you are trying to get that seven of spades set up as the tenth trick. If the spades are 3-3 then you have two spade tricks available in the dummy as the ♠7-6 are both winners. So you can draw trumps (assuming they aren't 4-0) ending in dummy and cash the last two spades. That's an overtrick. If the spades are 4-2 you have to cross to dummy with a trump, ruff another spade (high) and then cross back to dummy, draw the last trump if there is one and finally cash the last spade. Phew!

Note that if you draw trumps prematurely, then you won't have sufficient entries in the dummy to do all your work – that is: the ruffing out and managing the entries to dummy and the drawing of trumps. To forestall the letter-writers, I realise that a 5-1 spade break means that the king of spades will be ruffed and declarer will go two down instead of one down. Shame. The play is well worth that risk, don't you think?

The spade ruffs in declarer's hand gained no extra tricks by themselves – they

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were, however, an essential part of ruffing out dummy's side-suit. If you understand that one, try this one.

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

♠ 10 4 2
 ♥ K Q 8 7 4
 ♦ A 8 2
 ♣ 10 4

♠ A K Q J 5
 ♥ A 3
 ♦ 7 6 3
 ♣ J 9 7

Count – plan – execute (this formula never varies). Let's start by counting winners and losers. Firstly winners: five spades, three hearts, one diamond and no clubs. That makes nine winners. Now losers: no spades, no hearts, two diamonds and two clubs. That makes four losers.

Any attempt to ruff a club on the table is doomed to defeat – declarer will suffer the loss of two clubs and two diamonds before he gets going. How about playing for a 3-3 heart break, then? Cash three hearts, throwing a diamond and then give up two clubs and ruff a club in the dummy? No, that's a really bad idea and sloppy thinking. If hearts are 3-3, then declarer may as well draw trumps and run five heart tricks, actually making an overtrick. Best play is to assume that spades are 3-2 and hearts 4-2 (at least that fits in with the odds – these are the most likely breaks).

The most accurate line of play is as follows: win with the ace of diamonds, cash two top trumps in hand (if spades are 4-1 declarer needs a 3-3 heart break). Assuming East-West both follow to two trumps, you can now ruff out the hearts: ace of hearts, king of hearts, ruff a heart with a high trump. Cross to the ten of spades (which has the double effect of drawing the last trump and gaining an entry to dummy) and cash the last two hearts. Declarer now has five trump tricks, four heart tricks and the ace of diamonds.

Finally, a deal to show that if you bid the spots off the cards you have to be able to play them with care, attention and elegance . . .

★★★★★

Deal 4
 South plays in 4♥.
 West leads the ♠10

♠ J 6
 ♥ 10 7 2
 ♦ A 9 7 5 4 3
 ♣ 8 3

♠ K 5 2
 ♥ A K Q J 5
 ♦ 8 2
 ♣ A 9 4

Four Hearts, eh? How did you reach such a contract? I know: your partner bid like a lunatic; I've heard it all before. Here West kicks off with the ten of spades, East winning with the ace of spades and meanly returning a trump. Where are your ten tricks coming from? Count – plan – execute. You have the king of spades, five hearts, the ace of diamonds and the ace of clubs as top tricks. You might get a spade ruff on the table for a ninth but you can't expect to get too far by ruffing things in dummy – when you lose the lead you can expect another trump to come whistling back at you at just under the speed of light. So, eight winners. Losers? A spade, no hearts, a diamond and a club. Odd – eight tricks, only three losers. That doesn't add up. (Actually, you have two club losers – and an extra spade loser – if you were to draw trumps).

Anyway – let's make 4♥, by playing for trumps and diamonds both to break 3-2. If they do, we cannot be defeated. Can you see the winning line? If not, then stop and work it out.

Did you get it? The answer is that you need to ruff out the diamonds *and* to reach them with the ten of hearts. To get the timing right, you must duck a round of diamonds. So . . . win the trump return in hand and duck a diamond. Win the return (a trump?), cash the ace of diamonds, ruff a diamond high in hand – setting up the diamonds – and then cross to the ten of hearts. By now the trumps will have been drawn and all the diamonds will be good. You will make one spade, five hearts, four diamonds and a club. That's eleven tricks. Maybe you won't need to criticise your partner's bidding after all . . .

CLUB PLAYER'S BIDDING QUIZ

ON each of the following problems, you are West. What should you bid with each hand on the given auction?

Julian Pottage gives his answers on page 54.

Hand 1

♠ 6
 ♥ K 8 3
 ♦ K Q 9 6 5
 ♣ A 10 7 6

| | | | |
|----|------|----|-----------|
| W | N | E | S |
| | | | Pass Pass |
| 1♦ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 2♣ | Pass | 3♣ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

Hand 2

♠ 8 6 5
 ♥ Q 5 4 3
 ♦ A 9 7 5
 ♣ K 8

| | | | |
|---|----|---|-----------|
| W | N | E | S |
| | 1♣ | | Dble Pass |
| ? | | | |

Hand 3

♠ J 7 2
 ♥ A K 2
 ♦ A Q 10 2
 ♣ A K 6

| | | | |
|---|---|---|----------|
| W | N | E | S |
| | | | 1NT Pass |
| ? | | | |

Hand 4

♠ 9 5 3
 ♥ A Q 8
 ♦ K Q 10 7 6 5
 ♣ 8

| | | | |
|---|---|---|----------|
| W | N | E | S |
| | | | 1NT Pass |
| ? | | | |

Hand 5

♠ Q
 ♥ A J 8
 ♦ 10 8 5 3
 ♣ A K 8 6 3

| | | | |
|----|------|----|------|
| W | N | E | S |
| 1♣ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

Hand 6

♠ Q 10 8 3
 ♥ K 10 7
 ♦ K Q 7 4
 ♣ K 7

| | | | |
|---|---|---|----|
| W | N | E | S |
| | | | 1♦ |
| ? | | | |