April 8th - Giving Partner a Ruff

It is frustrating when you have a void in a suit, and trumps available, but partner does not lead the suit to let you ruff one of the opponents' winners. Avoid putting your partner through this pain by following these guidelines.

When you have Ace and King in a suit and you are on lead
It is normally a good idea to lead the ace so you can have a look at dummy and plan the defence. You should also look at the card played by your partner who should be following "high encourage, low discourage" (unless you have a different arrangement). You may need to consider the other cards you can see in the suit (your hand, dummy, the card played by declarer) to work out whether your partner is trying to encourage. For example,if you hold AK854, dummy has QJ10 partner plays the 6 and declarer plays the 3 where is the 2? Partner may well have a doubleton and is intending to show this by playing the 2 on the second round. If you decide partner is encouraging you to continue the suit then go on with the king and they should play a lower card than on the first trick - this is how we show a doubleton by playing the higher card first. Play a third round of the suit and partner will ruff or play the queen.

When partner leads Ace followed by a small card
This normally shows that partner has only two cards in that suit. Win the second round with the king if you have it and play a third round of the suit. If you haven't got the king you may get the lead later on and can lead the suit back for a ruff.

When partner leads a singleton
It is difficult to know whether partner has led a singleton. The ♠9, for example, could be a singleton or the start of a high/low sequence to show a doubleton or it could be top of rubbish. How do you know which it is? You cannot be sure but it may be you can get clues from the same sources as previously - your hand, dummy, the card played by declarer. Leading a suit bid by the opposition is normally a bad thing to do so if your partner has done it this could show a singleton. Leading an ace then switching to a different suit often shows a singleton.

Second Ruff
If you are giving partner a ruff and you have an entry (e.g. an ace) in one of the other suits you can tell partner to lead that back to you. When leading, choose a low card to show the lower of the other two suits and a high card to show the higher of the other two suits. So if spades are trumps and partner is void in diamonds, play a high diamond if you want a heart back and a low diamond if you want a club back.

You need to have trumps to get a ruff
There is no point showing a doubleton or leading a singleton if you don't have any trumps.

Do it early
If your partner has shown a void in a suit and declarer starts to draw trumps you need to get in straight away to give your partner a ruff. So, if you have the ace, take it as early as you can so you can give partner a ruff. Don't hold onto it until the second round. This is a time to ignore "second hand plays low".

If both partner and declarer are void in the suit
It may be that you lead AK of a suit and everyone follows. You have three cards left and dummy has two. This means that both partner and declarer are void. If there are now winners in dummy you should continue with the suit. Partner will ruff and declarer will over-ruff. This means that you have forced declarer to ruff one of their winners. They would have preferred to throw a loser away and you have prevented that which should benefit you in the long run.