

Trump coups.

A previous article in this series concerning the play of the hand showed just how important trumps are and how they can generate extra tricks. However, sometimes we have to avoid a loser in the trump suit itself to make our contract. This deal is not too difficult, so long as you understand the mechanics of the trump coup, but few declarers were able to make game on this one :-

West		East	
♠	AKQJ8	♠	10
♥	AK	♥	Q108653
♦	J73	♦	756
♣	AKQ	♣	1094

East/West bid easily to 4♥ which seems to be the best contract. However, 3NT is cold because the diamonds split 4-3 and 4♥ can go down if not played properly. South found the diamond lead and declarer had to watch them cash 3 diamond winners. Then they led a spade. Obviously, 4♥ is easy if the hearts split 3-2 but, if that were the case, I would not have included this hand.

Declarer won the ace of spades at trick one and ruffed a spade as a precaution in case it was necessary to shorten his trumps in preparation for a trump coup against North. He then cashed the ace and king of hearts and South showed out on the second round. So, declarer ruffed another spade and returned to dummy with the ace of clubs. He then cashed the king of clubs as well but, just in case the clubs did not break favourably, he led another spade. North had started with 3 spades, 4 hearts, 4 diamonds and 2 clubs and so he was now short of spades and clubs and was hoping that declarer would lead a 3rd round of clubs. Instead, he led a 4th round of spades. North could ruff it or discard his last diamond, it did not matter. If he discards, declarer would discard his last club leaving him with only the queen and 10 of hearts. He could then lead anything from dummy and he would over ruff which ever trump North decided to play. If he ruffed in, the trump coup just starts 1 round earlier. Either way, declarer cannot be prevented from making 10 tricks.

This is a relatively simple example of the trump coup, but several good players went wrong. Perhaps some declarers tried to cash 3 rounds of clubs rather than playing to discard one on the spades, or perhaps they just did not understand the mechanics of a trump coup.

This next hand is a little more difficult than the previous hand because the defender with the long trumps was sitting over the declarer :-

West		East	
♠	Q1063	♠	AKJ5
♥	A6	♥	Q108732
♦	A85	♦	4
♣	K863	♣	95

West opened the bidding with 1NT which was overcalled by North with 2♣. East simply bid 4♥ which became the final contract. At first, this looked like a missed opportunity and 4♠ should have been the final contract. However, 4♠ fails on repeated diamond forces and trump leads and 4♥ is the only game contract that can be made, without help from the opponents.

The lead was a diamond and 4♥ appeared to be an easy contract, until trick 2. Declarer took the diamond ace at trick 1 and then cashed the heart ace, under which North placed the singleton king! It seemed that South, who had started with J954 in hearts, had to make 2 trump tricks and declarer possibly had 2 losers in clubs. So, he ruffed a diamond and led a club to determine how many club losers he faced. North held the ace and so the king was doomed to fail leaving declarer with 2 club losers. Therefore, he had to concentrate on reducing 2 heart losers to 1.

The normal way of achieving this is to remove all the opponents' exit cards while reducing your own trump holding to the same length as the defender's. Then you exit with a small trump at trick 11 so that the opponent has to lead a trump into declarer's major tenace. This seemed impossible on this hand because declarer's hand and dummy both held 4 spades. It is impossible to eliminate the spades without one of them being ruffed. But wait, what if South is distributed 3433 exactly? Then, declarer can ruff 2 diamonds and 1 club leaving him with only the queen and 10 of trumps, so he can cash 3 rounds of spades and then lead the 4th round of spades at trick 11. South, reduced to 3 trumps only, has to ruff the 4th round of spades and then lead a trump into the Q10 tenace. So that is what happened, and declarer was lucky as the deal was distributed exactly as he needed for the trump coup to be successful.

It would seem that the odds are definitely against this contract succeeding because it requires a precise distribution of the cards. However, is it really too difficult to work out that a precise distribution of the cards could help and then be able to make the most of it? Most end plays and coups are quite easy to perform but they do need a little study and practise but, in most cases, if you just try for a coup such as this one, you will be no worse off if you get it wrong. Then you can analyse the deal later to work out why you went wrong. I have a lot more material like this if anyone is interested.