

BEGINNERS' LESSONS

Welcome

Teacher: Douglas Russell

Telephone: 480 2294 or 021 235 2220

Email: *DouglasKeithRussell@gmail.com*

Prepared by Douglas Russell for Auckland Bridge Club



The Play of the Hand in Suit Contracts

- Basic card play techniques
- Drawing trumps
- Trumping losers
- When to delay drawing trumps



BASIC CARD PLAY TECHNIQUES

We start by looking at some cases where declarer knows at once how many tricks a suit will produce:

North (dummy)

K Q 6



A 7 5

South (declarer)

It is not hard to see that this suit will provide exactly three tricks – provided that the ace from the South hand is not played on the same trick as either the king or queen from dummy.

The order in which the top cards are played will determine in which hand the lead remains after the tricks are made.



Winning tricks with low cards

Sometimes it will be possible to establish extra tricks simply by playing out top cards in a suit and exhausting the opponents of their cards in that suit. Then, any remaining cards (even low ones) will become winners:

North		
K 8 6 4		
J 9 3	10	
A Q 7 5 2		
South		

Initially, the low cards in this suit are easily beaten. However, if declarer plays his ace, king and queen (in any order) then all the opponents' cards in the suit will have gone. This means that the low cards remaining are now worth tricks.



Winning tricks by promotion

Apart from laying down aces, kings and queens, declarer can establish extra tricks by forcing out enemy high cards:

North		
Q J 4		
10 7 5	■	A 8 6
K 9 3 2		
South		

South has no immediate trick to “cash” (another term for make) but he can establish two certain winners by forcing out East’s ace. If East does not take his ace on the first round of the suit then declarer continues with a second round.


With the slightly lucky 3-3 “break” in the six cards held by the opponents, the fourth card in South’s hand will also become a winner.



A long suit is often able to provide extra tricks even when the low cards do not look too promising:

South has two immediate tricks in the suit, but the rest of his cards are as low as can be.

However, all he needs is a 3-2 split in the five missing cards to produce two more winners.

North				
A 5 4 3 2				
J 10 9		Q 8		
K 7 6				
South				

One trick is conceded to whichever opponent holds three cards and then four tricks are won. Note that it does not matter whether it is the third trick or the first which is lost.



The finesse

A finesse is a way of playing the cards in such a way as to win a trick with a card despite one of the opponents holding a higher card.

How is this magic worked? Consider the following:

Dummy

A Q 8

Declarer

6 5 4

You can make 2 tricks in this suit if your LHO holds the king of the suit. You lead a small card from declarer's hand towards the AQ. If LHO plays the king you win the ace; if not, you play the queen

Of course, if RHO has the king, this won't work



Dummy

K 3 2

Declarer

6 5 4

You lead small towards dummy's king. If LHO holds the ace and plays it, your king will be worth a trick later. If he plays low, you play the king which wins. Again, if RHO has the critical card, this will not work.

In both of the examples we have considered, the chances of success (in the absence of additional information) is 50%.

If the alternative is to hope for a kind break of a number of outstanding cards in another suit, then we should be able now to estimate which is likely to be the better chance. An even number of cards missing will probably not split evenly, but an odd number will probably split as evenly as possible.



Dummy

Q J 10

Declarer

A 5 4

This is another simple finesse position. Declarer arranges for the lead to be in dummy (North) and then leads the queen (it does not matter which card is led).

If East plays low declarer also follows with a low card. He is finessing against East's (hypothetical) King.

When East holds the king, dummy's card will win the trick. The finesse may then be repeated. Of course if East covers any of dummy's cards with his king, South takes the trick with his ace, leaving any cards in dummy as winners.

Once again, the chance of success is 50%.



THE VALUE OF TRUMPS

Introducing the various ways in which trumps can be used

1. Drawing trumps

- On many hands where you have chosen a trump suit, it will be right to draw the enemy trumps when you gain the lead. This will often leave you with a trump or two in your hand or dummy (or both) after all the enemy trumps have gone. After all, you have chosen trumps – it is probably a suit where you and your partner are well off.
- We shall look at a few hands where you gain the lead and decide to draw trumps. The trump suit is the only aspect of the hand that changes.



Counting trumps

- It is terribly frustrating, when playing in a suit contract, to have one of your winners ruffed by a defender when you thought that all the enemy trumps had been drawn.
- When playing trumps, it is essential to count how many have gone, so that you know when the defenders have run out. After all, you cannot always afford to play one round more than necessary “just in case”.
- It does not matter how you manage to count trumps as they are played. You can even use your fingers if it helps!

One way that works for many players is to take the number of trumps held by declarer and dummy away from 13. This is how many the opponents hold between them. Whenever both defenders follow suit, deduct two from this total. If only one follows, or one of them makes a ruff, deduct one.



In each of the following hands, the contract is 4♠ by West and North leads the ♣Q. Dummy's ♣K loses to the ♣A and South plays back a club, which you ruff.

Hand 1

♠ K Q J 10 8
♥ 9 6 2
♦ A K Q J
♣ 3



♠ A 9 6 3
♥ A 8 3
♦ 7 6 4 2
♣ K 2

With two hearts to lose (in addition to the club trick already lost) how do you proceed?

No problem here. After ruffing the club, you can draw the enemy trumps (neither opponent can hold more than four spades) and then cash five top winners in the red suits for ten tricks.



Hand 2

♠ Q J 10 8 7
♥ 9 6 2
♦ A K Q J
♣ 3



♠ A 9 6 3
♥ A 8 3
♦ 7 6 4 2
♣ K 2

You cannot afford a trump loser, and must hope that ♠K is held by North. Lead ♠Q and, if it not covered, finesse. You will make the contract when the finesse works (50% of the time) and go down when it fails.

Hand 3

♠ K J 8 7 5
♥ 9 6 2
♦ A K Q J
♣ 3



♠ A 9 6 3
♥ A 8 3
♦ 7 6 4 2
♣ K 2

The best chance of avoiding a trump loser here (in the absence of any clues from the bidding) is to play the ace and king of spades. This is slightly better than trying a finesse.



Hand 4

♠ K J 10 8 7

♥ 9 6 2

♦ A K Q J

♣ 3



♠ A 9 6

♥ A 8 5 3

♦ 7 6 4 2

♣ K 2

With eight trumps, the odds are against the queen dropping if you play the ace and king. It is better to finesse – which way is up to you!

If you choose to play North for the missing ♠Q then you can play low and finesse the ♠9 in dummy. Or, better, you can lead ♠J and tempt a cover from North, solving the problem.

There is an old saying for this situation which reminds you when to finesse: “Eight ever, nine never”

Only apply this “rule” if there is no other clue from either the bidding or the earlier play to guide you.



Trumping the defenders' winners


One of the more satisfying aspects of playing in a suit contract is when you get the chance to trump one of the enemy high cards that seemed destined to take a trick.

In no trumps, a high card in the suit led is always going to win the trick if there are no adverse cards out to beat it. In a suit contract, there is the one, vital, additional factor: *trumps*.

We have already touched on the aspect of trumps giving you control. As well as winning a trick for your side, trumping the enemy high card gives you the opportunity to gain the lead and decide which suit is to be played next.



Trumping losers

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

In 3NT by W, North can cash the first four tricks in hearts. When declarer gains the lead, he needs to make nine tricks.

With only eight top winners, declarer's best chance of a ninth trick is the club finesse. Unlucky: South holds ♣Q

In 4♠, declarer's two small clubs can be ruffed in dummy, as long as only two rounds of trumps are played first. This adds two tricks with ruffs to the eight top winners. Contract made.



Making extra tricks by ruffing

A trump suit gives several opportunities for plays which are not available at No Trumps. It gives the possibility of providing extra tricks by ruffing (or trumping) in the short trump hand.

♠ A K 7 6 5 2

♥ A 4

♦ A K 4

♣ A 3



♠ J 3

♥ 9 8 6

♦ 9 7

♣ 9 8 7 6 5 4


Although a game contract is rather ambitious, clearly 4♠ is considerably better than a 3NT contract after a heart lead. If spades split 3-2, you have five tricks in the suit, plus four other top winners. The tenth trick can come from ruffing the third diamond in dummy (before drawing trumps, of course).



Setting up extra winners by trumping

♠ A K Q
♥ J 9 7
♦ Q 9 7
♣ 8 7 6 5

♠ J 10 9 8 6
♥ A 3
♦ 3 2
♣ A 10 3 2


♠ 3 2
♥ Q 10 8 6 5
♦ J 10 8
♣ K Q J

♠ 7 5 4
♥ K 4 2
♦ A K 6 5 4
♣ 9 4

Contract: 3♠ by West. North starts with three top trumps, (South discarding ♥5) then plays a club to ♣J and ♣A

The defence has two tricks in clubs to cash when they get in. The only hope of extra winners lies in diamonds.

Declarer plays ♦ A K and then ruffs a diamond. The fortunate 3-3 split leaves two diamond winners in dummy, and ♥K provides an entry. Declarer now has the nine tricks he needs.



Here is another example of establishing extra tricks in a side suit by using trumps to ruff out the enemy high cards:

♠ A K Q J 10 9

♥ K 7

♦ A 2

♣ Q 4 3



♠ 8 7 6

♥ A 8 6 5 3

♦ 9 8

♣ A K 2

Contract: 7♠

by West

With twelve top winners, you need to establish a thirteenth trick without, of course, losing the lead. The heart suit can provide a third trick (in addition to the ace and king) if it splits no worse than 4-2.

Win the opening lead, draw trumps, then play ♥ K, ♥ A and ruff a heart. If the suit splits 3-3, you are home. Should it split 4-2, enter dummy with a top club and ruff a further heart. There is now an established heart in dummy, with a club entry.



Distribution, not points

♠ A K Q J 10
♥ 4 2
♦ 2
♣ A K Q 3 2



♠ 4 3 2
♥ 9 8 6 5
♦ 9 8 7 4 3
♣ 9

Contract: 4♠

by West

Opening lead: ♠5

There are only eight top winners, but a small club can be ruffed in dummy. If the enemy clubs split 4-3 (a 62% chance) this will establish West's remaining small club as a winner.

Win the opening lead, play ♣A and then ruff a small club in dummy. Draw trumps; a 4-3 club split now gives you ten tricks, despite only holding 19 points between you.

A triumph for distributional values!



WHEN TO DRAW TRUMPS

Before playing a card from dummy, declarer should make his plan. Sometimes there will be enough top winners to ensure success.

♠ A K 2

♥ A 8 6 4 2

♦ A 9

♣ A 4 3



♠ 8 4 3

♥ K Q J 3

♦ K 7 3

♣ 9 5 2

West to make 4♥

North leads ♠5

West can count ten top winners. In no trumps, it would not matter in what order these were cashed. In 4♥ it is necessary to draw trumps first to avoid one of declarer's winners being trumped by a defender.



We shall consider later hands where there is a good reason to defer drawing trumps. Meanwhile, here are more hands where, as usual, drawing trumps early in the play is correct.

♠ 8
♥ 10 9 8
♦ 9 8 7 6 4
♣ Q 10 8 6

♠ A J 10 6 5
♥ 7 5 3
♦ K Q 5
♣ A 3



♠ K Q 4
♥ Q 6 4
♦ A J 10 6 2
♣ J 4

♠ 9 7 3 2
♥ A K J 2
♦ -
♣ K 9 7 5 2

West to make 4♠

Opening lead: ♥10

The defence win the first three hearts and switch to a club, won by ♣A. Now what?

There is no problem as long as declarer does not block the spades. If he does, the defence will score a diamond ruff.



Establishing tricks

♠ A K 2
♥ A 8 6 4 2
♦ Q J 9
♣ A 4



♠ 8 4 3
♥ K Q J 3
♦ K 7 3
♣ 9 5 2

West to make 4♥

North leads ♠5

West can count eight top winners. Two more tricks can be established in diamonds by driving out the ace.

In no trumps, it would be good play to establish the diamond tricks early on. In 4♥ it is necessary to draw trumps first to avoid one of declarer's winners being trumped by a defender. Then it is safe to play on diamonds.



An extra trick by ruffing

♠ A 7 2

♥ A 8 6 4 2

♦ A 8 3

♣ A 4



♠ 8 4 3

♥ K Q J 5

♦ K 7

♣ 9 6 5 3

West to make 4♥

North leads ♠5

West has nine top winners and needs one more for his contract. A diamond ruff is the obvious chance.

Plan to draw trumps first by leading small to the king. If both opponents follow suit, draw trumps then organize the ruff. However, if trumps split 4-0 you must take the diamond ruff before drawing all the trumps.



When a top trump is missing

Previously, drawing trumps was easy as the top cards in the suit were held. Even if you are missing a top card, however, it is usually right to draw trumps, otherwise you run the risk of one of your winners being ruffed by a defender.

♠ K Q J 4 2

♥ A J 8 3

♦ A 2

♣ 7 4



♠ 10 7 5 3

♥ K Q 7 2

♦ J 8

♣ A 8 3

Contract: 4♠ by West

Opening lead: ♣K

West should win the opening lead and play on trumps at once, driving out the ace. When he regains the lead, he can finish the job of drawing trumps. Should he delay this procedure, the defence may score an undeserved ruff to defeat the game.



♠ Q J 10 9 8
♥ A J 8 3
♦ A 2
♣ 7 4



♠ 7 6 5 4
♥ K Q 7 2
♦ J 8
♣ A 8 3

Contract: 4♠ by West

Opening lead: ♣K

Declarer, who is missing both the ace and king of trumps, may hesitate to play the suit. However, all this would do is almost certainly allow the defence to later trump one of his winners, probably in hearts.

Win the opening lead and play a trump, driving out one of the two missing honours. When you regain the lead, play another trump, driving out the other honour. If a defender still holds a trump, draw this as soon as you regain the lead.



Delaying drawing trumps

There are various factors that may make it right to defer drawing trumps. Here is a simple example.

♠ A J 10 9 2

♥ A K 2

♦ 4 3

♣ 10 6 3



♠ K Q 3

♥ 8 6

♦ 9 8 7 2

♣ A K 5 2

West to make 4♠

North leads ♦A and continues with ♦K and a third diamond

Ruff the third diamond, but do not draw trumps. The tenth trick will be a heart ruff in dummy, and this must be taken before dummy is exhausted of trumps. Take the ruff, then draw trumps. Normal breaks will give declarer ten tricks.



One further example of a hand where it is right to defer playing on trumps.

♠ K Q J 10 9

♥ A 3

♦ Q J 4

♣ A 7 3



♠ 8 4 3 2

♥ K Q 5

♦ K 7 5

♣ 6 4 2

Contract: 4♠ by West

Opening lead: ♣K


Declarer will be able to establish ten tricks in due course: four spades, three hearts, two diamonds and a club. However, if he wins the opening lead and plays on trumps, the defence may be able to cash four winners: ♠A, two clubs and ♦A.

Declarer must try to get rid of one of his losers. Before playing trumps (which will concede the lead) he must first play three rounds of hearts, discarding a club loser. Now, when the defence win ♠A, they have only two more winners to cash.



N  wasgij

A	J	6	2	A	8	6	5	A	10	9	6	5		
♠	♠	♠	♠	♥	♥	♥	♥	♣	♣	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦

W  wasgij

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

Pass 4♥ Pass Pass

Pass

1♥

E  wasgij

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

S  wasgij

9	K	Q	J	7	4	9	7	K	Q	J	4	2		
♠	♥	♥	♥	♥	♥	♣	♣	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦



1. Contract = 4♥, Lead = ♣K

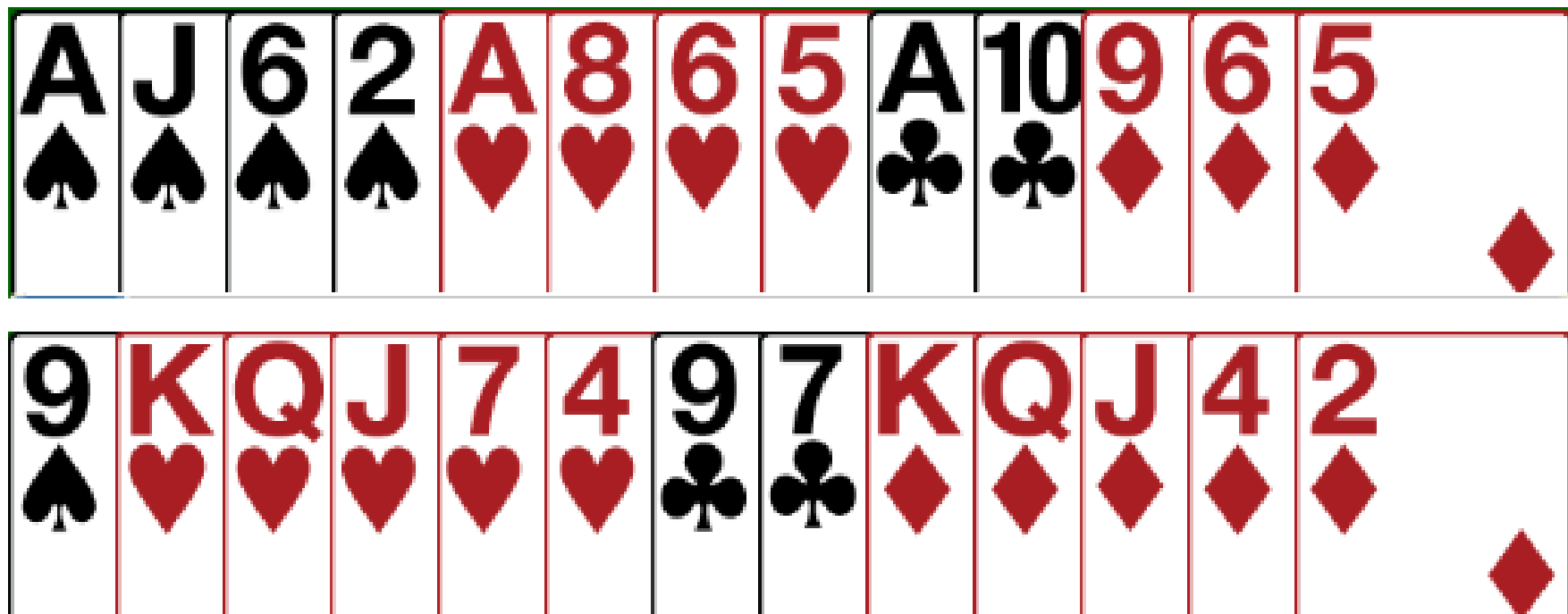


We have only 1 club loser and 1 diamond loser –
our contract is guaranteed

If you can guarantee your contract, draw trumps



Contract = 4♥, Lead = ♣K

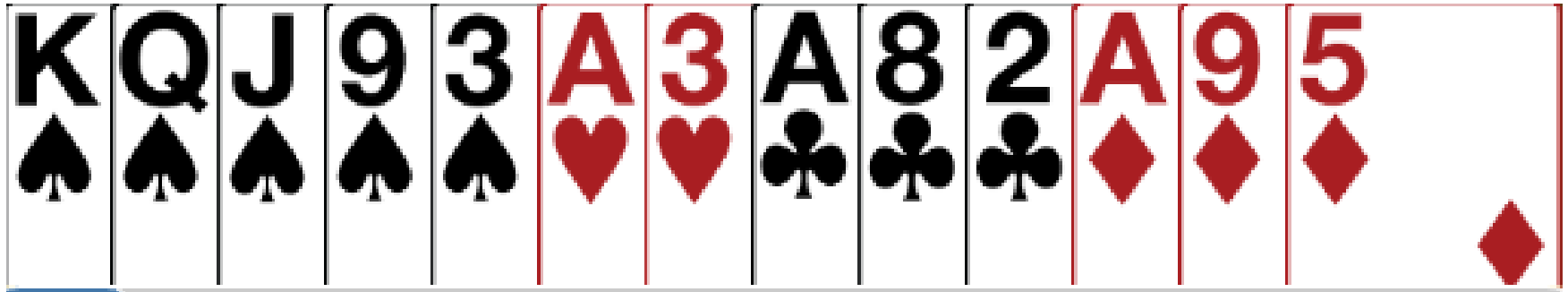
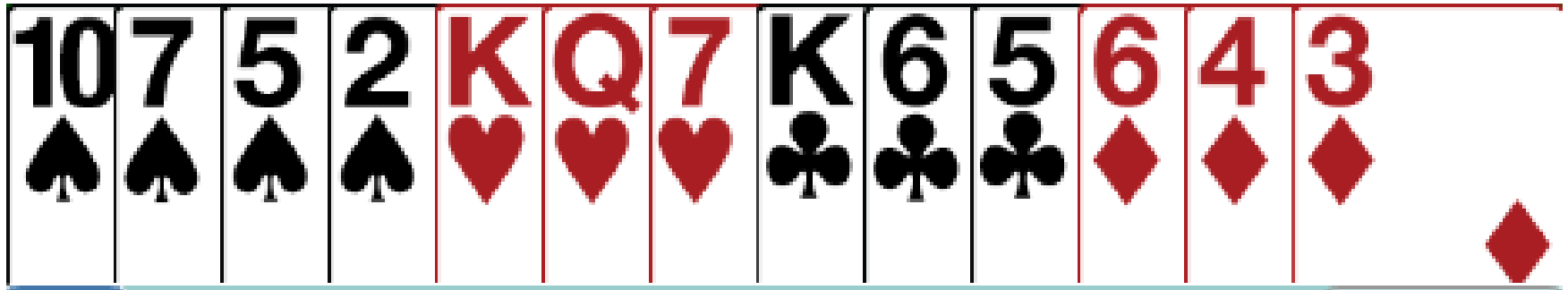


If you can guarantee your contract, draw trumps

Draw trumps until there are none left. Make sure you count them.



2. Contract = 4♠, Lead = ♣Q

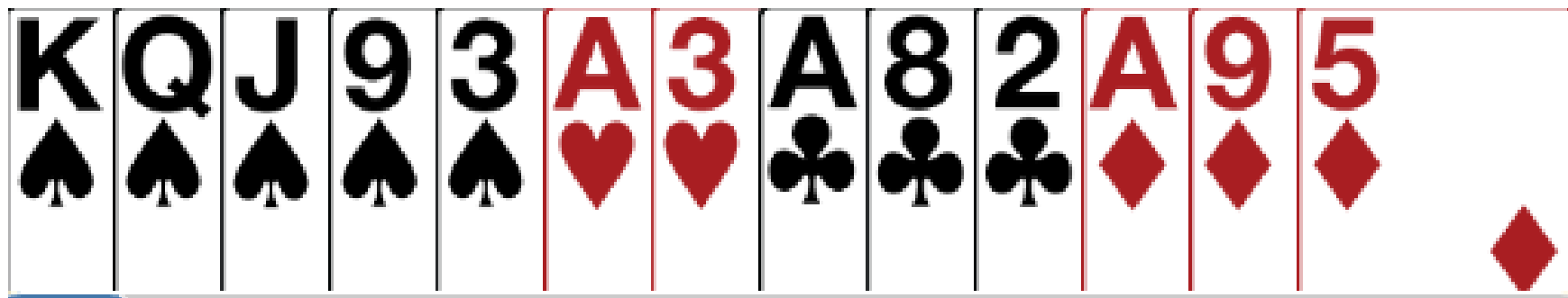
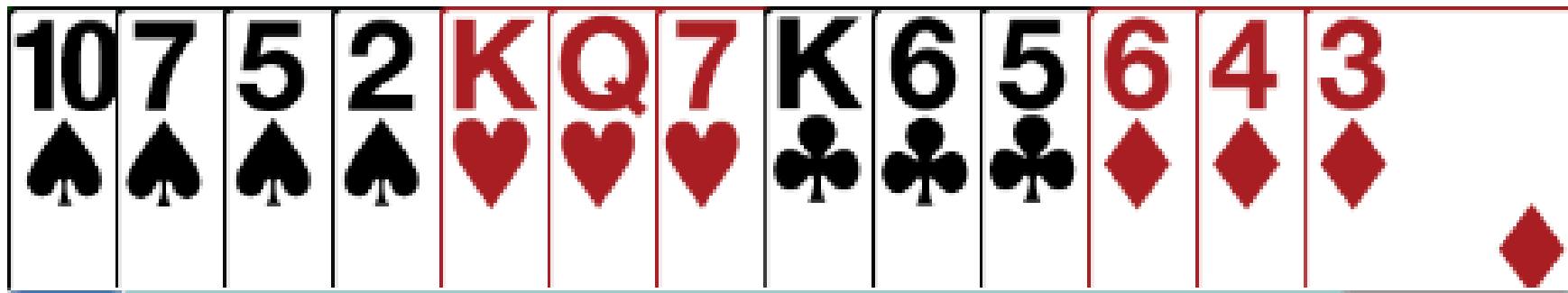


You have 4 losers ... one spade, one club and two diamonds

If you can guarantee your contract, draw trumps



Contract = 4♠, Lead = ♣Q

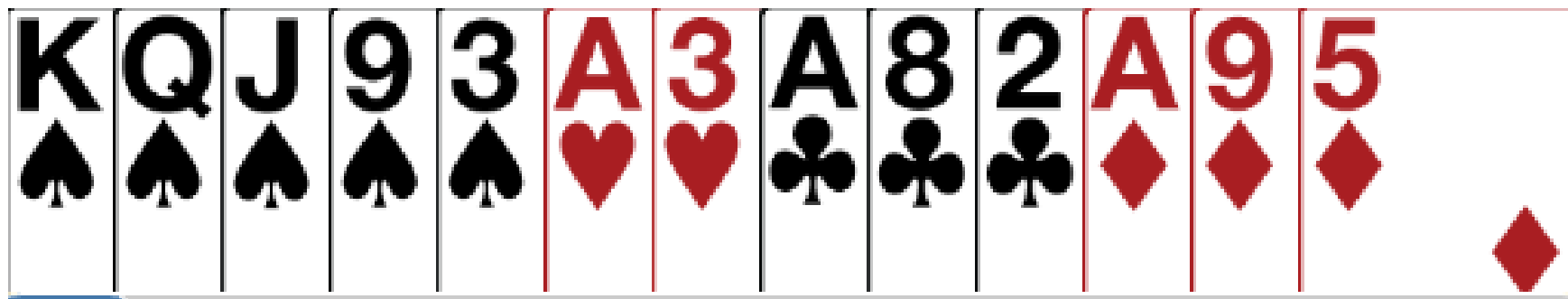
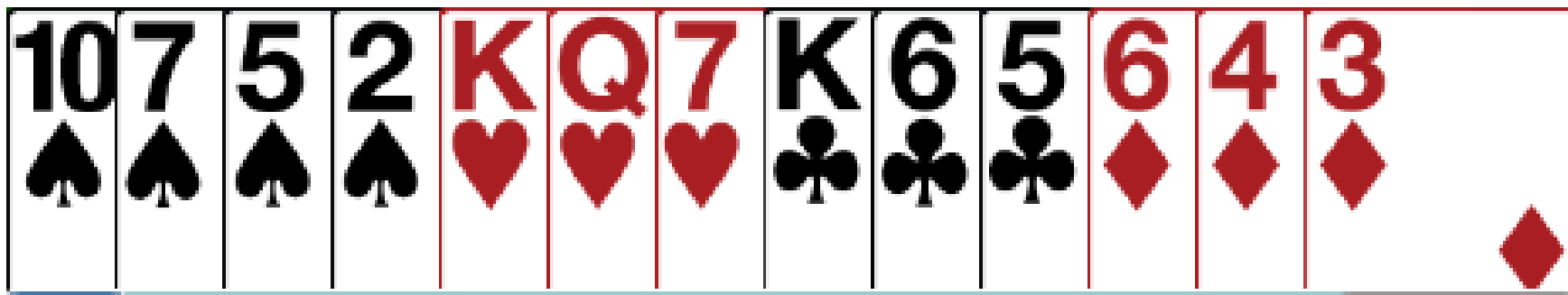


You can get rid of a loser by discarding it on the ♥Q ...
BUT you must draw trumps first

If you can guarantee your contract, draw trumps



Contract = 4♠, Lead = ♣Q



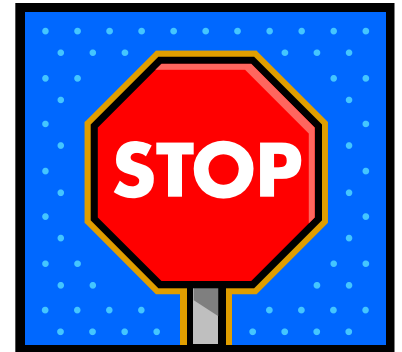
Draw out the trumps until they are all gone (you will lose to the ♠A at some stage)

If you can guarantee your contract, draw trumps



Play of the Hand – Trump Contracts

- Draw trumps first
- Remember to count how many trumps are left out
- STOP drawing trumps when:
 - Only the highest trump is left OR
 - Your Opponents trumps have run out



**BUT ... There is an
EXCEPTION**

SORRY!



Play of the Hand – Trump Contracts

- If dummy has a shortage in a side suit you may be able to score extra tricks by ruffing with dummy's trumps

CAUTION

**THIS MEANS YOU CAN'T DRAW ALL THE TRUMPS
STRAIGHT AWAY**



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