

The Next Level: Week 17

Declarer Play in Suit Contracts- Drawing Trumps

Last time we looked at how to go about our planning and execution as declarer in a suit contract. We really rammmed it home about **COUNT and PLAN!** For good reason!

Remember the mnemonic on how to do that? **ATTITUDE**

- A** Aim – how many tricks are we aiming to make?
- TT** Top Tricks – how many tricks can we take without losing the lead?
- I** How to increase from our Top Tricks to reach our Aim
- T** Threats- what can we immediately see that might wreck our plan?
eg opposition cash winners before we can ditch losers, or ruff our winners
- U** Unhelpful distribution- can we plan to cater for a bad split?
- D** Defence- what options has the opposition got?
eg drawing our trumps that we plan to use to ruff, or holding up to deny us access to long suit winners
- E** Execute our plan

This time, were going to focus on a key decision you must make every time you are the declarer in a trump contract.

DRAWING TRUMPS

You must decide- should you

- (1) draw trumps immediately
- (2) delay, to do something else first
- (3) not draw trumps at all, and play for a cross ruff.

The general rule -the default option - is to **draw trumps as soon as possible.**

Of course there are exceptions, which we will get on to in this lesson, and as you get more experienced you will learn to recognise them. **But if you always start by drawing trumps, unless you can see a compelling reason not to, you will be right most of the time.** For inexperienced players, far more contracts needlessly fail through not drawing trumps when you should, than by drawing trumps when you shouldn't.

Why is it usually right to draw trumps straight away?

Unless your bidding has gone astray, you should have a **fit** in the trump suit (ie 8 or more cards between yourself and partner). By drawing trumps you prevent opponents ruffing your side suit winners, and you **retain control of the play of the hand.**

Don't be put off if you find you are missing a few high trump cards! It will still usually be right to draw trumps as soon as you can. And it's a nice feeling when two opposing trump honours crash on the same trick!

So if you remember just one thing from this lesson, it's when declaring in a suit contract, draw trumps straight away, **unless you see a good reason not to.**

Here are three key situations which it's important to be able to recognize:

1. We need some ruffs to **increase our Total Tricks**, and drawing trumps will leave us short. We need to use trumps in the SHORTER trump hand to score ruffs, and if we draw trumps, they'll be gone. (Remember that ruffing in the longer trump hand won't create any extra tricks – they are tricks you will win anyway)
2. We have some **immediate losers** we need to dispose of early; if we draw trumps and have to lose the lead in doing so, the defence will be able to cash their winners before we can get rid of them.
3. We need a trump as **an entry** to cash a long suit.

As soon as your opponent leads to the first trick, and dummy is tabled, you are going to make a plan. Count your tricks, and see whether you need any of your trumps in the short trump hand to generate tricks.

Here are some key examples of situations when you might need to **delay** drawing trumps.

Situation 1 – you need to ruff losers

Here you are South, declaring in 6♠.

♠ Q 10 6
♥ 3
♦ J 7 4
♣ Q J 6 5 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9 8 7 4 2
♥ A 8 4
♦ A K Q
♣ void

West leads K♣. What's your plan?

We know we have to lose the A♠, so we need to take the rest, and must ruff the club lead in hand. Let's count our tricks. If we draw trumps, we can count 6 trumps tricks (losing one to the A♠), and A♥ and 3 diamonds – that's 10 – two short. We'd be left with two heart losers in hand. Note that ruffing clubs in hand doesn't generate extra tricks – those trumps are winners anyway.

We need to take two ruffs in the **short** trump hand, ie dummy, before drawing trumps, so we plan to play A♥ at trick two, ruff a heart, return to hand with a diamond, and ruff a second heart. Notice that if we try to knock out A♠ at trick two, the defence will win the A♠ and play another trump, leaving us one trick short, with only one trump left in dummy to ruff a losing heart.

Situation 2 – you need a fast discard

♠ J 10 7
♥ 8 4
♦ K 9 3
♣ A 9 7 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 9 8 6 5 3
♥ A 3
♦ A Q J 7
♣ void

Here you are South, again declaring in 6♠.

West leads K♥. What's your plan?

This is similar to the previous example, in that you must lose a trick to the A♠, so you can't afford to lose another trick. So you must win the A♥ on trick 1. But now what?

If you try to draw trumps straight away, the opposition will win A♠, and cash a winning heart, and you're down one. You must find a way of ditching the heart loser before the opposition get a chance to cash a heart.

Can you see how?

Cross to dummy on trick 2 by leading to the K♦, then play A♣ from dummy, and throw your losing 3♥ from hand. Now you can safely draw trumps. The opposition can win their A♠, but that's the end of the defence. Slam made.

Situation 3 – you need trumps as entries

<p>♠ 9 7 ♥ A K 7 6 5 ♦ 7 6 4 ♣ Q J 10</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 80px; height: 80px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 8 5 2 ♥ J 9 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ 9 7 5 3 2</p>	<p>♠ K 6 4 3 ♥ Q 10 8 3 ♦ 8 3 ♣ 8 6 4</p>
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	<p>♠ A Q J 10 ♥ 4 2 ♦ A J 10 5 2 ♣ A K</p>											

Here you are South, declaring in 5♦.

West leads out his two top hearts, taking the first two tricks, then switches to Q♣

We have already lost two tricks, so our contract depends on the K♠ being with East, so we can finesse it. So let us play to make the contract, and assume the K♠ is with East. But even if the K♠ is with East, we might need to lead a spade from dummy three times to pick it up- as in the layout shown. The only way of getting to dummy to

lead spades through East is to use **trumps as entries**. So, having won trick 3 in hand, we lead a small trump to the 9♦ (the highest trump out against us is the 8♦) and lead a spade. Assuming East plays low, we play the 10♠, and breathe a sigh of relief as West follows small.

Then another diamond to the K (or Q), and lead a second spade through East, playing the J♠ when East plays low. Again West follows - phew! So now a third diamond to dummy **draws the remaining opposition trump**, and a third spade is led from dummy through East. Assuming East plays low again, we play the Q♠ from hand, and fell East's now bare K♠ by leading A♠. Our contract is now safe – 5 trumps, 4 spades, and two clubs.

We could have been unlucky and had a 5-1 spade split against us, in which case we'd have gone down when West could trump the second spade trick. But we have chosen the line which gives us the best chance to make. When missing 6 cards in a suit, as spades in this deal, there's an 84% chance they break no worse than 4-2.

Situation 4 – establishing a side suit

<p>♠ K Q J ♥ 8 4 3 ♦ 9 5 4 2 ♣ Q 8 7</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 80px; height: 80px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 7 5 ♥ A K 6 ♦ A K ♣ A K J 10 6 3</p>	
	N											
W		E										
	S											

Here you are South, declaring in 6♣. West leads Q♥. How do you plan the play?

It might look as though our 6♣ contract is easy: we can count 6 clubs, two top hearts, two top diamonds, and two spades once the A♠ is knocked out, which comes to 12 tricks. But watch!

Say we win the opening heart trick, and draw trumps. We are not worried about an adverse trump split – even a 4-0 split won't trouble us as we hold the top 5 trumps. Then we lead a small spade towards dummy, expecting a defender to play the A♠. But the cunning defender can see you have no entries to dummy outside spades, so withholds the A♠ until the second round of the suit. Now you are sunk – your remaining winning spade is stranded in dummy, and you go 1 down.

The correct play is to draw only two rounds of trumps, crucially retaining Q♣ in dummy as an entry. Then play on spades. If a defender holds up his A♠ on the first round of spades, and takes it on the second, you can get back to dummy with the Q♣ to cash your winning spade.

Situation 5 – you need to cross ruff to make enough tricks

<p>♠ A Q 5 ♥ 3 ♦ A J 8 5 3 ♣ K Q 10 5</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ 10 9 8 ♥ J 9 ♦ K Q 10 7 6 2 ♣ 7 2</p>	
N						
W E						
S						
<p>♠ 6 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 10 6 4 ♦ 4 ♣ 6 4 3</p>	<p>♠ K J 7 ♥ A 8 7 5 2 ♦ 9 ♣ A J 9 8</p>					

Here, East was dealer and opened 2♦.

Eventually you as South ended up declaring in 6♣.

West led a trump (the 3♣). What is your plan?

You can count only 5 tricks outside trumps: 3 spades, a heart and a diamond, and the lead has pulled two of your trumps. You must make all your remaining 6 trumps separately, to add to the 5 outside winners plus the first trick in clubs, to come to the 12 you need. A cross-ruff is your only option. You have played the 5♣ from dummy on trick 1, so all your remaining trumps are high, and you can't be overruffed. So things look promising. But note: **it is vital to cash your side-suit winners**

first before embarking on the cross ruff. Why? If you don't cash your 3 spades for example, West will discard spades when you are ruffing diamonds, and be able to ruff in when you later try to cash your spades.

So the plan is to win the first trick in hand, cash A♥ and A♦ and three spade tricks, then cross-ruff in diamonds and hearts for 6 more tricks, then concede a trick at the end.

Summary

When you are declaring in a suit contract, always take out trumps as soon as you can, unless you can see a good reason not to.

Trumping in the long trump hand won't usually give you any extra tricks, but you can often generate extra tricks by trumping in the short trump hand.

Situations where it's **NOT** a good idea to draw trumps straight away:

1. Where you need to ruff losers in the short trump hand, and drawing trumps would remove the trumps you need.
2. Where you need a fast discard of a loser, and would lose (or risk losing) the lead by drawing trumps.
3. Where you need trumps as entries to manage the play in a side suit, eg to take a repeated finesse.
4. Where you are establishing a side suit, and you need to retain a trump as an entry to cash the established winners.
5. Where you need take your trumps separately to make enough tricks for your contract (a cross-ruff).

Jim Steele
January 2022

