



Trouble with Trumps

ONE of the most common pitfalls for improving players involves the use (or misuse) of trumps when declaring a suit contract. As always it is important to make a plan before embarking on a particular line of play. A crucial part of this process involves the decisions of when to draw the opponents' trumps and how to make best use of declarer's own trumps.

Drawing Trumps Early

If the declarer is lucky enough to start with sufficient winners to fulfil his target, then it will be important to protect those winners. Thus, it will be necessary to draw the opponents' trumps early in the play.

Mistakes People Make: Drawing Too Many Trumps

Having decided to draw trumps, it is useful to know the point at which to stop playing trumps. Ideally, declarer will get rid of all of the opponents' trumps, while retaining surplus trumps with which to trump the opponents winning cards. The first step is to count the missing trumps. A useful tip is to count down the opponents trumps as they play them (for most people, counting down from a number like 'five' is easier than counting up to 'thirteen'). Declarer should

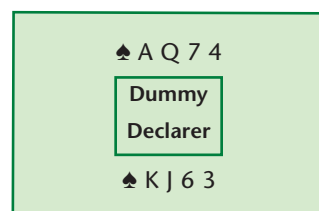
aim to get rid of all of the missing trumps, but should be aware of a frequent exception. *If only one trump is outstanding and it is the highest remaining trump, it is a waste to use any trumps getting rid of this 'master' trump.* Since it will always win a trick at some point, declarer should generally leave this trump outstanding (so long as there is no downside to this), not minding whether the opponents use it for trumping one of declarer's winners.

Delaying Drawing Trumps

Mistakes People Make: Always Drawing Trumps Immediately

It is not often the case that declarer has enough winners at the start. He may therefore need to generate extra tricks. If these tricks are to be developed without the use of his trumps, or he has a surplus of trumps (often the case when the partnership hold ten or more trumps), then declarer can still afford to draw trumps early. However, if tricks are to be made by trumping, then in order to retain enough trumps to achieve this, it may be necessary to delay drawing trumps.

Consider the following example, where spades are trumps:



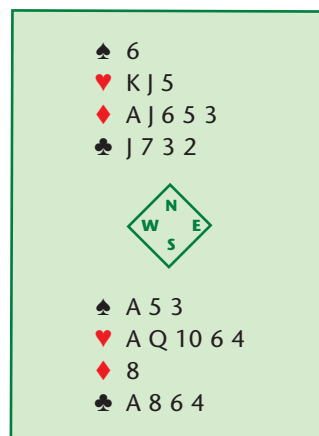
Imagine that declarer has identified the need to make two extra tricks. He will have to make sure that he has two spare trumps with which to do this. Even if the opposing trumps divide evenly (3-2), it will take three rounds of trumps to draw them. Playing three rounds of trumps will only leave one trump in each hand, and declarer will now be unable to trump twice in the same hand.

Trumping in the Appropriate Hand

Mistakes People Make: Trumping in the Wrong Hand

Having identified the need to make tricks by trumping, a potential stumbling block involves the decision of which hand it is best to trump in.

Consider this layout, where South is the declarer in 4♥:



West leads the king of spades and South

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