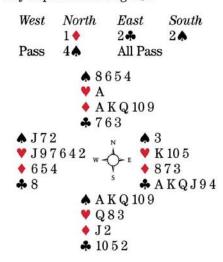


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Trump promotions

You are East defending against 4♠ after the auction shown. Partner leads the ♣8. Cover up the West and South hands and plan your defense. Is there any hope of defeating 4♠?



Analyze the opening lead: Partner surely is leading from shortness — a doubleton or singleton — so you will win two or three club tricks. You win the \$\mathbb{A}\$J and cash another high club. Partner shows out. You have three club tricks. Where can you find one more trick?

North tells you where it *can't* be found — not in diamonds and not in

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hearts. That leaves only the trump suit. You can peek at West's hand now. He does not have a natural trump trick because his spades will fall when declarer leads the suit from the top. You can change that by leading a fourth club.

Offering declarer the chance for a ruff-sluff is not usually recommended, but doing so here promotes West's AJ into the setting trick. If declarer ruffs with the A10, West overruffs. Ruffing higher turns West's AJ into a trump trick on power. Discarding to ruff in dummy lets West ruff with the AJ.

To be clear, I am not advocating offering declarer ruff-sluffs willy-nilly. You made the play because you could see no tricks were coming in diamonds or hearts. Rather than hoping that partner had a trump trick, you took action to turn West's AJ into a winner.

Declarer isn't always helpless against a trump promotion. On the next deal, plan your play as South in 4 first deal, West leads the 8. You lose the first two tricks to East as West follows with the 2 at trick two. East continues with a third high club. How do you plan to make 4 ?

A K 7 2

V A

Q 10 7 6 2

A 6 4 3

A J 10 9 8 6 4

V K Q J

A 3

A 10 9

Analyze the lead. The ♣8 appears

to be from shortness. West's second card confirms that. You have already lost two tricks and still must lose a diamond and possibly a spade. That's too many.

You could try ruffing the third club high, hoping that East holds the ♠Q so that West can't overruff. The downside of that plan is that if West does overruff, you have no way to eliminate the diamond loser, and 4♠ will be defeated. Is there a better option?

What if you don't ruff the third club but discard your diamond loser? That eliminates the possibility of an overruff if East leads a fourth club. In such a case, let the lead ride around to dummy. If West ruffs, overruff with the \$\dagger\$7 or \$\dagger\$K, depending on what card West plays. If West doesn't ruff, the \$2 will do. If East leads anything else, you win and play a top spade. If both defenders follow suit, draw the only outstanding trump and claim. If West holds all three missing spades you can avoid losing to the AQ by finessing. If East has all three spades you were destined to go down but can feel good knowing you gave it your best shot. West's hand:

♠Q5 ♥987432 ♦854 ♣82

Discarding the ♦3 was the right choice. If you had ruffed, West would overruff while dummy helplessly followed suit. Pitching a card you had to lose anyway avoided the need to worry about the location of the ♠Q on most trump splits. In bridge, you're not obligated to ruff when you can't follow suit. Sometimes discarding a card you have to lose anyway is a better option.