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This Week in Bridge

(445) Suit Play – Dummy Reversal

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

When declaring a hand in a trump suit, one of the first things we learn is to *count our potential losers from the long trump hand*. After doing this, we then think of the other hand as a resource for getting rid of these potential losers. Although this is a starting point for how to play a hand, it is still possible to count the losers from the short side and use the other hand as a resource for getting rid of those losers. This type of declarer play is called *Dummy Reversal*. We refer to this type of play as dummy reversal when we are setting up the short side, whether it is the dummy or not. Dummy reversal can be our chosen line of play for a variety of reasons, some of which are the location of honors, entries, which suit the defense leads, or that this produces extra tricks and may be the only way to make the contract.

Dummy Reversal - Turning the Short Side into the Long Side

When we have a trump fit with a long side and a short side, a 5-4 fit for example, then we usually set up the hand with the long trump. But there are times when we may choose to set up (count our losers from) the hand with the shorter trump.

Example 1

KQJT9 A876

With a 5-4 fit, if the opponents force us to ruff in the 5-card side early in the play, then we are now down to a 4-4 fit. In this case, we can easily choose to set up either hand. It may be advantageous, based on entries or other play considerations, to continue the line of play the opponents have led us down, and ruff more in the long hand (the original 5-card suit) and set up the 4-card side.

This is a classic example of dummy reversal.



Dummy Reversal - High Trump in Short Side

Suppose we need 6 tricks from the following trump suit in order to make our contract:

Example 2

West	East
AKQ	T5432

One line of play we could take is to ruff in the West hand, with one of the honors, and then play the Ace and King and see if the Jack falls, allowing us to score our 6 trump tricks. But another line of play to accomplish these tricks is dummy reversal. Instead of depending on the Jack to fall doubleton, we can try to produce these extra tricks by ruffing in the long side three times, effectively turning it into the short side.

Imagine that these were the ♠ and ♥ suits:

♠ AKQ	T5432
♥ A763	5

We could play a ♥ to the ♥A and ruff a ♥, play a ♠ to the ♠A and ruff a second ♥, play another ♠ to the ♠K and ruff a third ♥, exhausting all of East's trump. We could then return to the West hand in another suit and use the ♠Q to draw the final trump. This would give us 6 trump tricks!

When the short side has a large number of high cards it can be costly to ruff in that side. This is a time to consider a dummy reversal in order to produce additional trump tricks.



Dummy Reversal – Produce an Extra Trick

Another reason to play for a dummy reversal is to produce an extra trump trick that may not be easily available by other lines of play.

Example 3

♠ KQJ9

♥ 76

♦ A543

♣ KQ2

♠ AT843

♥ A54

♦ 2

♣ A876

In a 4♠ contract if we set up the long trump side, then we may be able to draw trump if the suit splits 2-2 ruff both our ♥ loser and our potential ♣ loser in the dummy. But if the trump split 3-1 then it will be dangerous to try ruff both of these in the dummy before we draw trump, leaving us with only 1 ruff and 6 total trump tricks. Instead, we can choose to try to set up the dummy, by ruffing all of dummy's ♦ losers in our hand (3 ruffs) and drawing trump with the dummy's 4-card trump suit – giving us a total of 7 trump tricks. On this line of play we take 7♠, 1♥, 1♦, and 3-4♣, making 12 or 13 tricks!

Conclusion

Reversing the dummy is actually a fun line of play. When doing so you often end up ruffing many losers in your hand (in the long side). Frequently the opponents think they are playing a “tapping defense”, forcing you to run out of trump in the long hand and will help you continue this process. By the time the opponents realize that you are trying to use up the trump in the long hand and set up the short side, it is often too late for them to do anything about it. When you are struggling to find a way to get rid of all of your losers in the long trump side, look at the hand from a different perspective, and give a dummy reversal a try.