

Planning the Play of the Hand

Declarer’s Strategy When Playing in Suit Contracts – II

Timing the Play of the Trump Suit

1. When to Draw the Opponent’s Trumps Immediately:

A. When Declarer’s trump situation is favorable and he/she has no immediate use for the trumps in his/her shorter holding (usually the Dummy - although if Declarer’s trump length is the same in both hands, then either hand can be regarded as having the “*shorter*” holding.), the first order of business is to remove the Opponents’ trump cards.

Declarer holds a green light to do so in the following instances:

(1) The trumps in Declarer’s shorter holding has no particular duties to perform; namely, no losers to ruff, no side suits to control, and no entries to save for later use in the hand.

(2) Declarer has such a large supply of trump cards that he/she can afford to draw the outstanding ones and still have enough left over for normal trumping purposes.

(3) One or more of Declarer’s long side-suits is established and ready to run, pending the removal of the last of the Opponents’ trumps.

B. When Declarer is threatened by a possible, defensive ruff, which he/she cannot afford, the Opponent’s trumps should be drawn immediately.

2. When to Stop Drawing Trumps:

A. When there are no more outstanding trumps. Declarer must always count the trumps accurately, so that he/she will not mistakenly draw an extra round, “*just to be sure.*”

B. When the Opponents still have trump cards, but

(1) There is one outstanding trump, and it is the highest remaining card in the suit. Declarer need not squander two of his/hers simply to drive out a loser that he/she cannot prevent anyhow (“*The “Rule of 1”*”). Declarer must ignore the missing trump and allow the Opponent who holds that piece to ruff with it whenever he/she wants to do so.

Suppose your trumps are **AKxxx** opposite **xxx** and, after you play the **AK**, only the **Queen** is left. You can never stop the **Queen** from winning a trick, and to remove it by leading another round of trumps would simply waste two of yours.

(Exception to the “Rule of 1”): If the Opponents’ “*boss*” trump can be used later to interrupt the run of a long, established side suit which has no external entries to it, Declarer should force out the last trump while he/she still has communication within the established suit.)

(2) No matter how many trump cards remain outstanding Declarer must stop drawing them when those that remain in the shorter holding still have vital jobs left to do. Whether they are needed for ruffing or for control, Declarer must save them until their work is completed, even though the Opponents will be left with some trump cards as well.

If Declarer's trumps are **AKQJx** opposite **xxx** and he/she intends to ruff one loser with the shorter holding, Declarer can afford to play the **AK** of trumps, before he/she takes the ruff. By eliminating as many trumps as he/she safely can, Declarer can reduce the chance that one of the Opponents will be able to "**over-ruff**" him/her.

Suppose your trumps are **AKQx** opposite **xxx** in the Dummy and the shorter holding controls one of the side suits. If you still have a loser to absorb before your outside tricks are established, you must leave at least one trump in dummy to continue its short-suit Control. Thus, you can safely cash the trump **AK**, but then you must abandon the suit, until your side loser is dislodged.

(3) If the Opponents' trumps divide badly, and if to draw them all would cause Declarer to lose control of the hand, he/she must turn attention to other suits, until the threat has passed. Declarer can regain a favorable trump position, either by finishing his/her side-suit work first, and then, if safe, revert to the drawing of trumps, or allow the Opponents to ruff until he/she can regain trump superiority.

3. When to Avoid Drawing Trump Altogether:

A. When Declarer has a pressing need for all the trumps in the "**shorter**" holding.

(1) Declarer Has Losers to Ruff: If Declarer's shorter-length trump cards are **xxx** and there is a void in the same hand, he/she has up to three potential ruffs, provided he/she does not draw trumps right away.

(2) Declarer Must Use the Trumps for Entries: If Declarer's trump suit is **QT9xx** opposite **AKJ** and he/she needs three or more entries to the Dummy just to work on side suits, Declarer can use the **Ace**, **King**, and **Jack** individually for this purpose. If, instead, he/she were to draw the trumps first, the entries would have to be found elsewhere.

B. When the Opponents Have the Capacity to Eliminate All the Trumps in Declarer's "Shorter" Holding, but Declarer Does Not Want Them To: Suppose Declarer's trump suit is **QJT98** opposite **xxx** and he/she has use for some, but not all, of the shorter-length trump cards. If Declarer were to mistakenly lead the suit, the Opponents might win both the **Ace** and **King** and then lead a third round to eliminate completely **all** of the Dummy's trumps.

C. When Declarer Has a Fast Loser in the Trump Suit and he/she Cannot Afford to Put the Opponents on Lead. Suppose the opening lead is in a side suit in which Declarer holds **Axx** opposite **xxx** and his/her trump suit is **KQxxx** opposite **JTxxx**. If Declarer wins the first trick and then plays trumps, the Opponents will grab the **Ace** of trump and cash two tricks in the side suit. To overcome this, Declarer should try to discard the two outside losers, if possible, **prior** to leading trumps.

D. When the Opponents Hold More Trump Cards than Declarer. Suppose through the power of modern scientific bidding, Declarer arrives at a contract in which the trump suit is **AKx** opposite **Jxx**. Since it would be futile to try to draw the trumps, Declarer must play side suits and force the Opponents to ruff instead.