

BRIDGE – BEGINNER’S LESSONS III - 25

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Planning the Play of the Hand

Declarer’s Strategy When Playing in Suit Contracts

Special Trump Plays

1. The Cross-ruff:

A. Definition: A “*cross-ruff*” is a playing strategy in which Declarer plans to use all or most of the trump cards, both in his/her own hand and the Dummy, for ruffing purposes. A “*complete cross-ruff*” occurs when Declarer exhausts his/her combined trump holding entirely by ruffing. A “*partial cross-ruff*” occurs when Declarer draws one or more rounds of trumps and then uses the remaining cards for individual ruffs in both hands.

Suppose the King of Clubs led against your **4S** contract and you hold the following hands:

AJ98	KQT7	If you win the Ace of Clubs and then draw four rounds of trumps, you will take only six tricks. If, instead, you cash the Ace of Clubs, then the Ace of Diamonds, and then ruff back and forth in the minor suits, without ever leading trumps, you will accumulate a total of ten tricks.
642	753	
6	A5432	
A5432	6	

B. The Basic Conditions for a Cross-ruff:

(1) Declarer must have two side suits with misfits, length in one hand opposite shortness in the other, and no obvious tricks to establish in lieu of the cross-ruff.

(2) Declarer must have the ability to ruff back and forth without interruption. This requires trump length in both hands, enough cards capable of being trumped in order to carry out the individual trumping, and good quality trumps to reduce the likelihood of an over-ruff.

C. Important Caveats:

(1) Trump leads are the biggest threat to Declarer’s cross-ruffing potential.

a) Whenever trumps are led, Declarer must commit two trump cards to the same trick. This is counterproductive to a cross-ruff, which is based upon using each trump card separately.

b) Declarer must avoid leading the trump suit himself/herself, unless the cross-ruff is intended to only be a partial one.

c) If Declarer must lose the lead before an attempt is made to cross-ruff, he/she must be prepared for a switch to trumps by the Opponents. If possible, Declarer must try to absorb losers early, hopefully, before the Opponents become aware of what Declarer is planning to do.

(2) If one of Declarer’s side suits is not involved in the cross-ruff, but contains some sure winners, Declarer must be certain to cash them early in the play. Otherwise, as the cross-ruff progresses, the Opponents may run out of cards in the suits Declarer is trumping, and, by discarding properly, they might be able to ruff Declarer’s side-suit winners, when he/she tries to cash them later in the play of the hand.

2. The Ruffing Finesse:

A. Definition: A “*ruffing finesse*” is an attempt to promote winners in a suit that contains a sequence of honors in one hand opposite a void in the other, by ruffing away whatever higher honors are missing.

With the **KQJT** opposite a **void**, Declarer can lead the **King** to take a ruffing finesse.

If the **King** is covered by the **Ace**, trump the trick to avoid a loser thereby establishing the **QJT** as winners.

If the **King** is not covered by the **Ace**, let it ride and discard a loser. If the **King** falls to the **Ace** in fourth hand, again the other honors are winners.

If the **King** takes the trick, Declarer can lead the **Queen** to repeat the finesse.

In essence, when Declarer tries a ruffing finesse, he/she is hoping to find one or more of the missing honors in the hand of the Opponent who plays in the 2nd seat, in front of Declarer’s hand which contains the void.

B. The Basic Conditions for a Ruffing Finesse:

(1) For a ruffing finesse to work, Declarer must have as many honors in the sequence as there are missing cards above it, plus at least one additional honor that he/she is trying to promote.

(2) The hand opposite the sequence must either have a void in the suit or few enough cards to become void very quickly, while the sequence is still intact.

3. Common Trump Mistakes:

A. Ruffing Established Winners: As the lesser honors and high spot cards get promoted to winning rank, they can ultimately be cashed, but only if Declarer recognizes them for what they have become. Through lack of attentiveness, Declarer may fail to note the fall of the cards and mistakenly trump a good trick. To err in this fashion is just as costly as ruffing one’s own Ace.

B. Failing to Ruff High Enough: Whenever Declarer attempts to ruff a loser prior to drawing the Opponents’ trumps, there is a risk of a defensive over-ruff. If Declarer can afford to ruff high and still draw trumps safely later on, the failure to do so is merely tempting fate.

Suppose Declarer’s trumps are **AKxxx** opposite **QJT_x** and he/she is forced to ruff a loser with the shorter holding, before he/she pull trumps. If Declarer ruffs with an honor it cannot be over-ruffed, and the remaining honors will suffice to draw the Opponents’ trumps without a loss.

C. Pulling One-Too-Many Rounds of Trumps: If Declarer draws an extra round of trumps only to find both Opponents discarding, he/she will have expended two valuable trump cards for no good reason. Unless Declarer is trump-rich, Declarer, oft times, cannot afford such a luxury. To avoid this pitfall, Declarer must be certain to count the cards in the trump suit very carefully, so that he/she can be sure of the trump situation, without having to take an unnecessary look.

D. Failing to Pull Trumps Because Yours are Weak: If you have eight or more cards in the trump suit, regardless of their rank, your quantity alone will justify an attempt to drive out the missing ones. If, instead, you play the side suits, sooner or later, you will suffer a series of defensive ruffs. It is far better to crash the Opponents' high trump cards together than to allow them to score them separately by ruffing.

Suppose Declarer's trump holding is **9xxxx** opposite **Txxx**. If Declarer draws trumps, he/she might restrict the losers to two (when the missing cards divide 2-2); if Declarer avoids drawing trumps, a cross-ruff by the Opponents might cost as many as four defensive ruffs.

E. Ruffing Unnecessarily With the Longer Trump Holding: Normally, the way to expand the number of trump tricks is to ruff in the hand with the shorter trump holding. If Declarer mistakenly ruffs with the longer ones, he/she is merely using up natural, long-suit winners. The greater danger, however, is that Declarer might lose control of the trump suit and perhaps of the whole hand.

Suppose Declarer's trump holding is **AKQxx** opposite **xxx**. If Declarer ruffs twice with the longer holding and then draws three rounds of trumps, he/she will lose the ability to control the side suits by ruffing, and if Declarer were to trump himself/herself down three times, he/she will lose control of the trump suit as well.

F. Exposing Your Winners to a Defensive Ruff: Declarer must try not to play side-suit winners, when he/she knows one of the Opponents can ruff, unless that is his/her intent. If Declarer cannot draw the missing trumps right away, then he/she must arrange the play in such a way as to minimize the threat or effect of a potential ruff. Frequently, Declarer can do this by leading up to his/her winners through a void defender.

Suppose Declarer holds **Axx** in the Dummy opposite **Kxx** in a side suit that is led, and he/she have reason to believe that the lead is a singleton. Win the trick with the **King** in Declarer's hand, so that if the suit is returned later for a defensive ruff, the **Ace** in Dummy will be safe in the 4th hand and need not be played to the trick. If Declarer mistakenly wins the **Ace** in the Dummy first, his/her **King**, now playing second on the return of the suit, will be trapped by the ruff.