

# Planning the Play of the Hand – Timing in Suit Contracts

**D. Timing in a Suit Contract:** Remember, when playing in a Suit contract, Declarer must count his/her losers and determine ways to reduce or eliminate them, if it is at all possible to do so; unlike when playing in a No-Trump contract where the Declarer must concentrate on dealing with winners, not losers.

## **1. Sure Losers:**

The loss of “*Sure Losers*” by a Declarer cannot be avoided as, by definition, they are unavoidable.

“*Sure Losers*” represent not only guaranteed tricks for the Opponents, but controls and entries for them as well. As controls, they prevent Declarer from running winners. As entries, they give the Defenders guaranteed access to the lead. The sooner these inescapable losers can be forced out safely and thus eliminated, the better the prospects for Declarer in determining the timing of the play, the maximizing of the tricks scored, and the securing of the contract.

## **2. Possible Losers:**

The number of “*Possible Losers*,” on the other hand, however, can, oft times, be either reduced or even totally eliminated by certain actions that are available, planned, and carried out by an attentive Declarer.

There are three basic ways to dispose of “*Possible Losers*”:

- a) **By Discarding Them:** The number of “*Possible Losers*” can sometimes be either reduced or eliminated by:

(1) Discarding them on any available alternate suit, “*Sure Winners*.” (e.g., with AKX opposite QX, Declarer can, if afforded the opportunity, have one immediate discard on the third round of the suit) or,

(2) Discarding them, eventually, on long-suit winners, once established.)

b) **By Trumping Them:** This is the most common reason for delaying the drawing of the trump suit, i.e., in order to ruff one’s losers. **Note:** Trick promotion via this method is only successful if one can trump in the hand (*usually the Dummy*) with the shorter trump holding. Trumping in the hand with longer trump cards does not increase the total number of tricks captured by Declarer.

c) **By Finessing:** In reality, to “*Finesse*” is nothing more than an attempt to minimize the number of losers in a suit that lacks one or more critical cards at, or near, its top. The finessing process is based upon the idea of leading toward the card, or cards, you hope will take a trick, and that the higher-ranking card(s) missing lie(s) in front of, not behind, the card with which you desire to win the trick. Finessing will, therefore, be successful 50% of the time.

**3. The Same Strategies For the Development of Winners When One is in a No-Trump Contract are Similarly Effective When in a Suit Contract:** They are, in review,

- a) Quantity:    b) Probability: (These strategies can be re-examined by  
 c) Safety:     d) Flexibility: reviewing the in “*Timing in No-Trump contracts*”)

**Summary:** Some consideration of winners may also be necessary for effective planning in suit contracts. The strategy to follow would be basically the same as that described for No-Trump hands. The attention paid to losers alone, however, will normally generate some useful ideas about creating winners,

Suppose you are playing 4S with the following hands, and the Queen of Hearts is led:

	<u>Losers</u>	
	<u>Sure</u>	<u>Possible</u>
xxxx	S = 1	0
AKx	H = 0	1
KQJ	D = 1	0
KQJ	C = 1	0
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KQJT9		
xxx	Total = 3	1
xxx		
xx		

Screening of the “**sure**” and “**possible**” losers in this hand shows that one too many losers would sabotage the making of this contract, and that to make the contract, Declarer must try to eliminate the 4<sup>th</sup> losing trick. Declarer can do nothing about the “**sure**” losers, but he/she must, therefore, look for the most effective way to eliminate the one and only “**possible**” loser in this instance.

a) If after you win the opening lead (say, with the Ace) you start on trumps, your Opponents will take the Ace of Spades and return a second Heart to drive out the King. Now, when they regain the lead with either minor-suit Ace, they can cash a Heart trick (your only “**possible**” loser) to beat the hand.

b) If instead of leading trumps at trick two you play Clubs. The Opponents will similarly win the Ace of Clubs and continue their attack on Hearts. This time, however, you can win the King of Hearts, play the QJ of Clubs, and discard a losing Heart. When the Opponents subsequently take the Ace of Spades and try to cash a third Heart trick, you can ruff it to make the contract. (\*)

c) To score a Heart trick the defenders must be on lead three times, twice to drive out the AK and once to cash their setting trick. The opening Heart lead puts time on the side of the defense. The Club “**switch**,” however, for an ultimate Heart discard gives the advantage in timing back to the Declarer.

(\*) Obviously, this line of play runs the small risk that the defenders will ruff one of your Club winners, and you will still be set. This will happen any time the missing clubs divide 6-2 or worse. By playing on Clubs first, however, you simply have an excellent, and the only chance to succeed. Alternatively, if you had played trumps first, you would have had no chance at all.