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## **BBW Lesson #5: Play of the Hand as Declarer in a Suit Contract**

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When playing as Declarer in a Suit contract, *first* count your **LOSERS**. Your primary focus MUST be on **"dumping" losers**, either (1) by trumping your losers from the other hand (preferably Dummy, if dummy holds fewer trump cards than Declarer), or (2) by sloughing losers on winners from the other hand. Trumping from Declarer's hand does not add "new" winners, but may be useful for transportation purposes!

For example, if Dummy hold K,x,x in trump, and Declarer holds A,Q,x,x,x in trump, you are likely going to take 5 tricks in trump. If you draw trump *early*, you will spend 6 of your 8 trump cards to take 5 trump cards from Opponents. If instead you can trump from Dummy *early*, you will later be spending fewer trump cards from Dummy to capture Opponent's trump cards, because Dummy will have fewer trump cards left! In later rounds of drawing trump, you may be spending only 1 trump card to capture 2 trump cards from Opponents, rather than spending 2-for-2.

If you can draw trump and then dump your losers later, all to the good. Otherwise, it may be necessary to focus on dumping your losers before you focus on drawing trump, if that is what you must do to make your contract.

### **Trumping in Dummy versus Declarer's Hand**

In general, Pairs seeking suit contracts try to identify situations in which a Partnership holds 8+ trump cards. However, lop-sided trump holdings are preferred over a 4-4 holding. Thus, assuming the Partnership holds exactly 8 trump cards, the ideal Partnership trump holding would involve Declarer holding 8 trump cards while Dummy holds 0 trump! This is because the Declarer

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can spend only 1 trump card to draw 2 of Opponents' trump. Of course, 6-2, or 7-1, or 8-0 trump splits, while better, are also harder to find than more common splits, such as 5-3 or 4-4.

Given that Dummy will hold a number of trump cards equal to the number of trump that Declarer holds, or hopefully fewer trump, this means that **trumping in Declarer's hand simply will not add any tricks** to the total number of tricks that you will take in a suit contract! Of course, trumping in Declarer's hand may still be useful for transportation purposes. But trumping in Declarer's hand does not create "new" Tricks!

For example, if Dummy holds 3 Spade trump cards, K,x,x, and you as Declarer hold A,Q,x,x,x,x of Spades, Declarer trumping with a low Spade will not take a "new" trick. Once trump are drawn, all of Declarer's trump will take tricks, whenever they are played, and **zero** "new" tricks"!

**Trumping in Dummy, however, is an entirely different matter.** If it is early in play, when it is less likely that Opponents have created new voids and hold trump, it can be very useful to exploit or create voids in Dummy, and then **trump from Dummy**, prior to drawing some or all trump. This means that, once you draw trump, you may be spending only 1 trump card to draw 2 of Opponents' trump rather than 2 of your trump for each Trick in which you draw trump.

However, as a general proposition, **waiting to draw trump when playing a suit contract can be quite dangerous.** It is generally best to draw trump as soon as you get the first opportunity to do so.

BTW, it is extremely important to accurately count the number of trump cards held by your Opponents. When you miscount trump, and lead trump to draw trump when there are no outstanding trump cards, this usually will cost you **1 Trick** that you would otherwise make!

### **Not Drawing Trump When Opps Hold the Highest Remaining Trump Card**

When there is 1 remaining trump card out, especially when Declarer and Dummy both hold trump, when the remaining trump card held by an Opponent is the highest trump card out, **do not draw trump.** And, of course, in this case it is especially

important to try to keep the lead away from the "Dangerous" Opponent who you think holds the high trump card, based on what trump cards that Opponent played as you initially began drawing trump, because that Opponent will surely (and wisely) drop both your trump cards with a single trump card once that Opponent has the lead.

The **exception** is if you hold a long suit you wish to run, in which case you may want to play your trump loser(s) to force out the last trump, so that you can then run that long suit unimpeded! Of course, one way to draw Opponent's last high trump is to keep playing the long suit until the Opponent finally uses the high trump card. That way you are dropping the missing trump card without spending trump cards from either Dummy or Declarer's hands. This makes more sense if you also have transportation back to the hand with the long suit once Opponents finally give up, and play that last trump card!

### **Some Principles that Apply Against All Contract Types**

#### **Always Lead "Low to High"**

It is **never, ever** to your advantage to lead "high to low." Sometimes it won't hurt you to lead "high to low," but it will never help you!

For example, if you as Declarer hold A,T,x,x,x in your trump suit, Spades, and Dummy holds K,9,x of Spades, lead "low to high," in the hopes that you will capture missing honors, and thus "promote" your Ten and/or 9 into winners.

If you as Declarer hold A,Q,x,x,x,x of trump Spades, and Dummy holds K,x,x,x of Spades, such that you are missing only 3 low trump cards, it may not hurt you to lead "high to low", but it won't help you, except possibly as regards transportation.

#### **Only Finesse When You Must, or Doing So Advantages You**

A finesse occurs when you lead from Dummy toward your Declarer's holding, for example, A,Q,x,x,x when you are missing the King, and you play the Queen, hoping that your RHO either holds the King, and "ducks," or plays the King, so that you can overtake the King. Or, for example, when from Dummy you play the 9 from a Dummy holding K,9,x, and you as Declarer hold A,J,T,x, and you "duck," hoping that your RHO does not play the Queen, thus

likely promoting all the remaining cards in the suit in a **NT** contract into winners.

**Be wary** of using a finesse (unless a successful finesse is the only way you can make your contract). The probability of a finesse, assuming Opponents have only PASSED, is **50-50**, which *ain't* very favorable odds. Here are some related considerations:

1. If one Opponent has bid, especially if that player sits first or second, a finesse becomes more attractive than a 50%-50% proposition, because you know that that Opponent holds the preponderance of the Oppositions' points, and you should **finesse through that Opponent**. If that Opponent does not take the Trick, you likely then know which Opponent holds a missing top honor, and you should then later finesse through that Opponent.
2. Whether or not Opponents have bid, a finesse becomes more attractive when you hold "touching" honors. For example, when Dummy holds A,Q,x, and you hold J,x,x,x, even if you finesse towards Dummy's Queen, even if you lose that trick, you have still "promoted" your Jack!
3. As you play, adjust your expectations about where honors lay, as play progresses. For example, if neither Opponent has bid, as play progresses, when 1 Opponent plays an honor, because HCPs are randomly distributed in a presumably equal manner, the likelihood goes up that the other Opponent holds the remaining honors.
4. In a similar vein, when 1 Opponent plays a missing honor, you should assume that this Opponent is *less likely to hold an equivalent honor*. This is called the "**Principle of Restricted Choice**." For example, if NORTH plays a low Heart, EAST following the principle "send hand low" plays a low Heart, SOUTH plays the Jack, and WEST wins with the Queen, the probability that EAST holds the missing King has now increased.

### **You May Wish to "Play a Loser Upon a Loser"**

When you are *inevitably* going to take Losers in both Dummy and Declarer's hand, it may be best to "play a Loser upon a Loser." For example, if in a suit contract your 2 hands hold low trump, such as Q,J,7,6,3,2 and T,8,4, you may wish to "bite the bullet," and play 2 Rounds of trump, to hopefully draw in the missing A,K,9,5 of trump.

### **When You are Trying to Knock Out Opponents' Top Honors...**

When you are trying to knock out Opponents' holdings in top honors in a suit, **lead from the top of the hand holding the fewest cards of the suit.** For example, if you as Declarer hold A,Q,x,x,x, and Dummy holds J,x,x, go to the Dummy, and lead the Jack toward your hand. If your RHO covers with the King, play your Ace. Otherwise, play low from Declarer's hand. Furthermore, there are now 13 - 5 (A,Q,x,x,x) - 3 (J,x,x) - 4 cards played on the Trick, or a single card left out: the King. So play from Dummy toward your Ace to take the last missing card.

### **At the End of Play, "Squeeze" Your Opponents!**

If there are only a few tricks left to play, and you hold a sure loser, do not play your sure loser until the very last trick. Bridge is about giving your Opponents *every opportunity to make mistakes!* For example, let's say you are in the lead, and you hold the 3 remaining Hearts in a **NT** contract, including the Queen of Hearts, and one of the Opponents holds the King of Hearts. Only lead your losing Queen of Hearts on the very last Trick, in the hope that the Opponent will slough the King of Hearts winner before the last trick.

### **Some Statistical Probabilities as Applied to Bridge**

For 37 years I taught applied statistics to graduate students. Since I retired, in casual conversation I always asked these questions, in exactly this order. Question **#1**: What did you do before you retired? Answer: I taught at universities. Question **#2**: Where? Answer: University of New Orleans, and then Texas A&M University. Question **#3**: What did you teach? Answer: Applied statistics.

No one, as in "no one," has ever (ever) then said, "Wow! Statistics was my favorite course!" So, you probably don't like statistics either! But some statistical principles, unfortunately, are very important to know about when playing bridge. A **great** 2-page Web Page that you should look at is the website "Relevant Probabilities for Bridge Players." You can find it by doing a GOOGLE search, or by going to the URL:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/taverham/Probabilities.pdf>

There are numerous probabilities about which you should be aware. For example, knowing the probabilities of *finding an 8-card fit with Partner go way up if your hand is 2-suited* (e.g., **74%** if you are 5-4 in 2 suits, **84%** if you are 5-5)! For example, the probability of you and Partner holding an *8-card fit* is **46%**, a *9-card fit* is **28%**, and a *10-card fit* is **9%**. However, there are 2 aspects of statistical probabilities that bear *in particular* on playing duplicate bridge.

**Split Probabilities for Even vs Odd Splits.** Here are some probabilities for different splits across different numbers of cards being held by Opponents:

<b>Even</b>	<b>Odd</b>
<b>6</b> Trumps Out	<b>5</b> Trumps Out
3-3: 35.5%	3-2: <b>67.8%</b>
4-2: <b>48.4%</b>	4-1: 28.3%
5-1: 14.5%	5-0: 3.9%
6-0: 1.5%	
<b>4</b> Trumps Out	<b>3</b> Trumps Out
2-2: 40.7%	2-1: <b>78.0%</b>
3-1: <b>49.7%</b>	1-0: 22.0%
4-0: 9.5%	
<b>2</b> Trumps Out	
1-1: <b>52.0%</b>	
2-0: <b>48.0%</b>	

There are 2 implications for you as a bridge Player. **First**, you can have more confidence in your expectations of what the split will be if there is an odd number of cards out as against an even number of cards being out! **Second**, you can generally be fairly confident that the 2 most likely splits (e.g., with 5 trumps out, 3-2 (**67.8%**) or 4-1 (28.3%), with 4 trumps out, 3-1 (**49.7%**) or 2-2 (40.7%), will **dominate** the probabilities, and are disproportionately likely.

**Probabilities for Dropping Missing Honors.** If there are **2** cards out, including among the honors, only the **King**, there is a **52%** probability that playing the Ace you will drop the **King**, so go for the drop. If there are **3** or **4** cards out, including among the honors, only the **Queen**, play the A,K to try to drop the Queen (**78%** and **52%**, respectively). If there are **5** or **6** cards out,

including among the honors, only the **Jack**, play the A,K,Q to try to drop the Jack (**73%** and **54%**, respectively).

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