

It is an advantage to choose a suit with 8 or more cards as trump. However, trump play is not as easy as many think. There are rules that should be known and applied very carefully.

Before starting the play, a player should analyze the lead, count the losers and look for ways of getting rid of these losers.

Evaluation of Honors and Spots in a Trump Suit

(A - K - Q - J - T - 9 - 8 - 7) are honors and spots with different values. However, when these honors and spots are shared by two opposite hands, they are treated as equal.

AKQ3 - JT92
AK52 - QJ43
KQ54 - JT32

The honor qualities of the holdings above are equal.

AK42 - QJT3
AKJ4 - QT98
AKQ2 - JT98

The honor quality of the second hand above is better than the first in this example.

COUNTING LOSERS

Losers are counted from the point of view of only one of the hands. By assuming that the direct winners are in this **Master Hand**, then all cards that are not direct winners must be counted as losers without considering shortnesses. Even the small cards in (AKQ4) or (AKQ63) holdings must be counted as losers. In order to make a good plan, it is essential to choose the Master Hand within which one counts losers. The trump holding is given priority in the making of this decision.

With (5-3), (6-3) or (5-4) trumps

The hand with longer trumps should be chosen as the Master Hand. There is no rule that the losers should be counted from the declarer's hand. The correct rule is to count them from the hand with longer trumps.

With (4-4) trumps

In order to choose the Master Hand, one must consider the length of side suits, trump quality, and entries.

▪ **When there is no side 5-card suit**

* **Choosing the Master Hand when the holdings are symmetrical:**

- The hand with fewer losers after counting from both sides
- If the number of losers are equal: The hand with the stronger trumps
- If the trump qualities are equal: The hand with more entries

* **Choosing the Master Hand when the holdings are not symmetrical:**

- The hand with fewer losers or the hand that contains losers easier to get rid of
- If the number of losers are equal, there is no transportation problem and the trump quality is approximately equal: The hand with a longer side suit that can be ruffed more and faster
- If opponents forces you to ruff at the beginning and your trumps are shortened in one side then the hand with the longer trumps becomes the master hand. After this, you continue ruffing from the shorter trump side as a result you won't be shortened at both sides and loose trump control

▪ **When there is a 5-card side suit:**

* **If the number of losers are equal**

- If there is no entry problem: The hand with 5-card side suit
- If there is an entry problem: The other hand

* **If the hand with the 5-card suit has more losers**

The hand with no 5-card side suit may be chosen as the Master Hand if it has fewer losers than the hand with a 5-card side suit and the prospect of ruffing losers does not seem to be a problem.

Even if such a decision would result in only a small chance of making the contract, that is enough of a reason to choose that hand as the Master Hand in the case that there is no chance to make the contract if other is chosen.

▪ **When both sides have 5-card side suits:**

- * If the side suits have same quality and length: The hand with better trumps
- * If there is no entry problem: The hand with longer side suit
- * A hand with a side suit that can be established by making the opponents play the honors should be chosen over a hand with a side suit that can be established with ruffs.

ENTRIES

There is a need for entries in order to ruff, draw trumps, and establish suits. After the lead, honors in all suits should be played carefully in order to preserve entries in the main hand, or the hand with a side suit to establish.

PLAN OF THE PLAY

“How can I get rid of my losers?”. The act of answering this question while considering the organization of transportation is what is known as the plan of the play. Each loser should be evaluated, for example: “This is a certain loser, it may be ruffed, it may be discarded etc.”. If it is impossible to get rid of all losers, a plan should be made for those losers possibly gotten rid of rather than spending time on certain losers.

Getting Rid of the Losers

In addition to the finesse, there are various ways of getting rid of losers. The most common ones are as follows:

- Ruffing
- Discarding on honors or a long suit in the other hand
- Establishing a long suit

RUFFING

Ruffing is the most natural technique in trump contracts. Even a beginner may use the ruffing technique very easily. Most of the time the trumps in the dummy are used to ruff the losers in declarer’s hand. As long as the declarer has longer trumps, this makes complete sense since ruffing from the Master Hand will not help to get rid of losers.

A player who has support in his Partner’s suit should reevaluate his hand by adding fit points for his shortnesses (void, singleton, doubleton) based on the prospect of ruffing. Declarer should use these shortnesses effectively during his play. Although ruffing seems easy, a good analysis is required to prevent problems and to do the correct actions. The main principles are:

- The possible ruffs and the overall plan must be rechecked.
- Timing is essential since you need to ruff before trumps are gone.
- Entry management is important therefore transportation must be organized.
- Small trumps should be used to ruff, big trumps should be used to get the trumps out.

It is easy to see when to ruff if there is a shortness in the hand with the shorter trumps and the Master Hand is long in the suit. However, ruffing a suit with 3 cards in the shorter trump side is not easy to see and the application is very difficult.

Ruffing Technique

You could think to leave as many trumps in the ruffing hand as the number of losers to be ruffed. However, this idea does not give the expected result. Ruffing should not be taken as an easy aspect of the play. You may need extra trumps if the defense has a chance to play trumps while you are preparing for the ruff, or if you need to lose a trick to create transportation between hands.

Therefore, you need the following number of trumps if you plan on ruffing:

After defining the number of losers to be ruffed (n), the number of tricks to be lost while you prepare the ruff (y), and the number of tricks to be lost in order to create transportation between two hands (z), then $(n+y+z)$ is the necessary amount.

A possible bad trump split and the opponents' possible trump defense should be taken into consideration. Without considering these, a cold contract may go down after drawing a few rounds of trumps.

- Is the best line of play to ruff?
- Can I ruff my losers? Can defense prevent this?
- Can I do something wrong that would prevent my plan working?
- How many losers do I need to ruff? Do I have enough chances to do that?
- Can opponents overruff? Do I have any ways to prevent this?
- How I can organize the transportation? What should I play after I ruff?

A player who has answered the questions above can start ruffing directly or indirectly. However, he has to prepare ruffs first.

Preparing for the Ruff

The suit to be ruffed must have different lengths in the opposite hands. In order to ruff a suit which is long in the Master Hand and short in the other hand, the shortness must be played off. This is called preparing for the ruff.

TRUMP CONTROL

The timing and the order of the play of the trumps are very important in trump contracts. You should plan safety play that takes ruffing, transportation, the defense's possible trump defense and a bad trump split into consideration.

Playing trumps unnecessary and ending up with no trumps (and no ruffs) after the defense's trump play is not good. It is also bad when the defense overruffs without a natural winner. The ideal card play technique is to leave a winner trump in the defense and start ruffing when trumps are (4-4) and not solid. In this plan, it is a big mistake to let the defense draw its winner trump and collect two of the declarer's trumps. In order to prevent this, ruffs and entries should be prepared carefully before playing trumps.

These kind of plays should be planned after counting all losers except those in trump suit while taking potential bad trump splits into consideration if possible or by assuming that trumps are split the best if not. This sensitive balance of planning is called trump control.

DISCARDING LOSERS

Another line of play is to discard losers of the Master Hand on the honors or the long suit of the other hand. In order for this to be successful, entries must be managed carefully, and the long suit of the other hand must be established in order to get rid of losers immediately or later. A ruffing finesse, a finesse and a ruff from the Master Hand are all possible techniques in order to create chances for the discarding of losers.

Discarding Immediately

If the defense has a chance to win the losers that still need to be gotten rid of when they get in or there is no way to go to the other hand again, the losers should be discarded immediately. In this application, opponents' overruff possibility must be taken as a risk. However, the defense's possible overruff with a natural trump trick is a lot better outcome than losing a trick that the defense could win directly.

Discarding Later

In the case that there are honors to prevent the defense from winning losers directly and there is no transportation problem, there is no need to discard losers immediately. Rushing to do so might lead to some problems: Defense might ruff, might overruff, or might attack a suit to make the declarer ruff from the Master Hand!

ESTABLISHING THE SIDE SUIT OF THE MASTER HAND

In trump contracts, the declarer wins tricks with direct winners, ruffs and established long suits. It is essential to play the side suit of the Master Hand like playing a NT contract with ruffing and establishing the suit if needed. The ruffs in addition to the established suit will also help to provide tricks in order to make the contract.

Establishing the side suit of the Master Hand and establishing the long suit of the other hand to discard losers are not same tactic. It is not mandatory to establish the long suit of the other hand, as ruffing the losers might be preferred if possible. However, establishing the side suit of the Master Hand is a very important line of play. The following guidelines should be known:

- * The side suit should be established before playing the trumps in case of a bad split in the trump suit or the side suit.

- * The trumps can be played if the side suit is solid or can be established by knocking out only one or two honors!
- * If the lead may be won from both sides and it is not necessary to establish one hand's side suit (it may be necessary to establish one hand's side suit in case a finesse or indirect finesse is needed), the lead should be won by the hand with shorter trumps so as to leave entries in the Master Hand. This rule is also valid after trump leads.

Winning the trump lead by the side with shorter trumps helps the declarer to win a potential second trump lead by the Master hand and ruff directly. By doing this, transportation problems can be solved and little trumps can be used to ruff.

- * In order to use the established side suit, the opponents' trumps must be drawn. Because of this, it is a good strategy to ruff from the hand with shorter trumps and return to the Master Hand with a trump. If a ruff is used to return to the Master Hand, and if a cross-ruff plan is chosen, the established suit cannot be used since there is no chance to collect the opponents' trumps!

Declarer does not need to establish a side suit if the trump spots are very good because opponents will be unable to overruff and declarer may cross-ruff to make the contract. In this case, direct winners should be cashed before starting the cross-ruff. However, the cross-ruff plan should not be used if there is a need to give a trick to the opponents in order to manage the transportation!

- * If the trump quality of two opposite hands are equal, it is an important strategy to use the highest of the equal trumps for ruffing a side suit or playing to opponents' trump lead. With the same logic, the lowest of the equal trumps in the Master Hand should be used to return to the Master Hand. This is an important guideline to prevent transportation problems caused by a blocked suit.
- * The entries should be managed in a way so that the opponents cannot play their trump winner, allowing for the trumps to be played in the correct time.
- * In order to establish a side suit, it may be necessary to ruff, return to the Master Hand with a ruff, and ruff again. If this plan shortens the Master Hand dangerously, the suit should be established by losing a trick directly.