



Bridge Cardplay: An Easy Guide

RUFFING LOSERS

David Bird & Marc Smith

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Contents

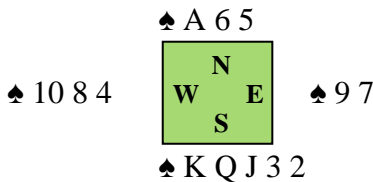
1. Ruffing in the short-trump hand.....	4
Quiz.....	9
2. Should I draw trumps before the ruff?.....	12
Quiz.....	17
3. Preparing for the ruff.....	20
Quiz.....	25
4. Should I ruff high or low?.....	28
Quiz.....	33
5. When is it wrong to ruff?.....	36
Quiz.....	41
6. Planning the necessary ruffs.....	44
Quiz.....	49

1.

Ruffing in the short-trump hand

There are many great pleasures that you can experience as declarer. One of them is ruffing a losing side-suit card to give you an extra trick. ('Ruffing' means the same as 'trumping'. It is the preferred term in most bridge writing.)

An important early lesson is that ruffing will give you an extra trick only when you ruff in the short-trump hand. Suppose you are playing in a spade contract, with the trump suit shown below. (As is the case throughout this book, and in nearly all bridge books, declarer will be sitting South. The dummy is North, with the defenders East and West).



If you simply play five rounds of the suit, you will score five trump tricks. Suppose instead that you ruff a side-suit card with dummy's ♠5 and only then play five rounds of trumps. You will score six trump tricks. Ruffing in the hand with the shorter trumps gives you an extra trick.

What would happen if you followed a different path, taking a ruff with the ♠2 in the South hand? When you subsequently played the trump suit, there would be only four tricks left. You would score a total of just five trump tricks – the same number that you had at the start.

It is an important lesson to remember. Ruffing in the long-trump hand does not give you an extra trick.

Let's look at a full deal:

	♠ Q 7 2										
	♥ K 4 2										
	♦ A 9 7 6 3										
	♣ A 5										
♠ 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; text-align: center; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 9 8 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q J 10 7		♥ A 9 3									
♦ Q 10 8 2		♦ K J 4									
♣ J 9 6 2		♣ Q 8 4 3									
	♠ A K J 10 5 4										
	♥ 8 6 5										
	♦ 5										
	♣ K 10 7										

West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

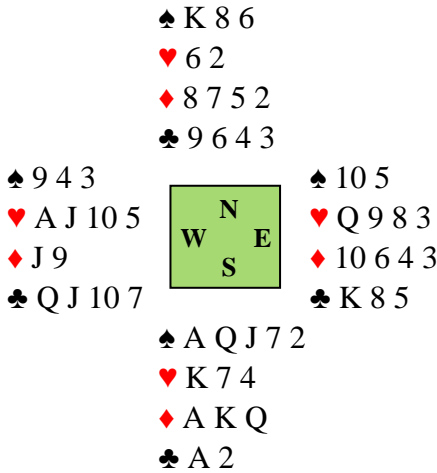
West leads the ♥Q. Since there is no chance that West holds the ♥A, you play low from dummy. He continues with the ♥J and you again play low from dummy, just in case East began with a doubleton ♥A. The defenders score a third heart trick and East then switches to the ♠9. How will you continue the play?

If you draw three rounds of trumps, you will score six trump tricks, the ♦A and the ♣AK. That will be a total of only nine – one down. Instead, you should secure a tenth trick by ruffing a club in the short-trump hand.

You win the trump switch with the ace and draw a second round of trumps with the king, West showing out. Then you cross to the ♣A and return to the ♣K. The time has come to take your ruff. You lead the ♣10 and ruff with dummy's ♠Q. After playing the ♦A, you return to hand with a diamond ruff to draw the last trump. The game is yours.

As you see, you made seven trump tricks – six in the South hand and one extra by ruffing a club in the North (short-trump) hand. Ruffing a diamond in the South hand did not provide an extra trick. You used it merely to cross back to draw the last trump.

Here is another one for you to try:



West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

How will you play the spade game when West leads the ♣Q?

To plan a suit contract, you count the possible losers when viewed from the long-trump hand. Here you start with three potential losers in hearts and one in clubs. A possible way to save a loser in hearts is to lead towards the ♥K, hoping that East holds the ♥A. Even for extremely lucky players, the chance of this succeeding is not much more than 50%.

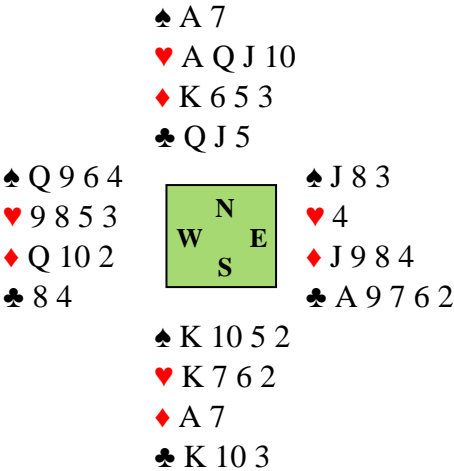
A second possibility is to ruff the third round of hearts in the dummy. Once West has missed the lead that would have proved most effective, a trump, a heart ruff should be possible.

Suppose you think you can combine the two chances and cross to the ♠K, continuing with a heart towards the king. You will not like what happens next. West will win with the ace and lead a second round of trumps. When you play another heart, preparing for a ruff in dummy, West will win and remove dummy's last trump. You can no longer ruff a heart and will go one down.

To avoid this sorry outcome, you should lead a low heart from your hand at trick two. Let's say that West wins with the ♥10 and switches

to a trump. You will win with dummy's ♠K and then lead a heart towards the king. If West wins with the ace and returns a second trump, this creates no problem at all. You win in your hand and ruff your remaining heart in dummy. Finally, you return to your hand with a diamond, draw the last trump, and claim the remaining tricks for the contract.

When you are playing in a 4-4 fit, neither hand can be described as the short-trump hand. Nevertheless, a ruff in either hand will increase your total trump tricks from four to five. On the next deal you must decide whether to take the ruffs in your hand or the dummy:



You do well to reach 6♥, and West leads the ♣8. East wins with the ace and returns a club. How will you seek twelve tricks?

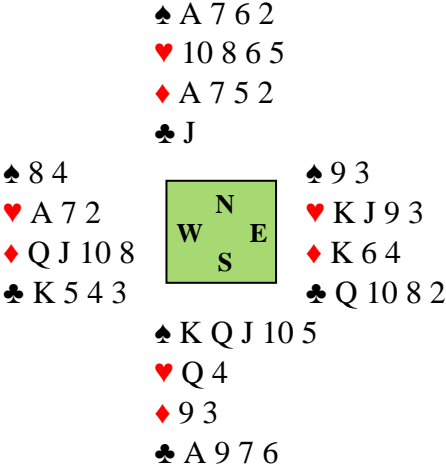
You have six winners in the side suits. If you draw trumps, you will take only four trump tricks for a total of ten. To make the slam, you need to take two ruffs in the dummy or two ruffs in your hand. This will give you a total of six trump tricks. Should you ruff spades in dummy, or diamonds in your hand?

If you ruff two spades with the ♥10 and ♥J, this will leave you with only the ♥AKQ to draw trumps. When the trumps break 4-1, West will score a trump trick for one down. To preserve enough high trumps to cater for a 4-1 break, you should ruff two diamonds in your hand.

You win the club return with the king and play a trump to the ace. After cashing the ace and king of diamonds, you ruff a third round of diamonds with the ♥7. A spade to the ace allows you to ruff dummy's

last diamond with the ♥K. You then cross to the ♥Q, draw West's trumps and claim the contract.

We will end with a deal where you may need to take three ruffs in the short-trump hand. You will have to plan the play right at the start.



West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	1♠

Your partner bids boldly to the spade game and West leads the ♦Q. How will you conduct the play?

There is no possibility of discarding losers or finessing. You must rely on ruffing club losers in the dummy. You win with the ♦A, cross to the ♣A and ruff a club with the ♠2. How will you return to your hand for another club ruff?

You cannot afford to cross to a trump. After a second club ruff you would have no quick re-entry for the third ruff. When you played a diamond, the defenders would win and remove dummy's last trump. After the first ruff, you must lead a second round of diamonds. East wins with the ♦K and switches to a trump. You win this in your hand with the ♠K, so that you can take a second club ruff with the ♠7.

A diamond ruff with the ♠5 returns the lead to your hand. You then ruff your last club with the bare ♠A. You have scored seven tricks already and your ♠QJ10 will bump your total to the required ten.