

Learning Points: Declarer Play – The Plan

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By Steve Moese (Mike Purcell, ed.)

Declarer Play Level: BASIC

- 1) Count High Card Points (**Is this contract normal**, stretching, or off the deep end?).
- 2) Count Winners (NT) & Count Losers (Suits) – **How many tricks do I need? Assume perfect defense.**
- 3) Count entries (Can I get back and forth to do everything I need when I need to?)
- 4) Identify how to eliminate losers or create winners.
 - a. Focus on making your contract
 - b. Identify clues from the lead or from opponents bidding (or lack of bidding)
 - c. Is there a danger hand? If so keep them off lead
 - d. How many tricks do you need to develop? (If none – DRAW TRUMPS!)
 - e. What suits offer the best chance for extra tricks?
 - f. How many times can you safely surrender the lead against best defense?
 - g. Know the best play for the number of tricks you need from a (side) suit.
 - h. Use the information you gather during play to adjust your plan.
- 5) What suits can you lead safely, and what suits must you wait for opponents to lead?
 - a. Suit Quality - Jxx opposite Qx(x)
 - b. Positional Stoppers – xxx opposite Kx
 - c. Slow Losers – Axx opposite Kxx
- 6) Combine your chances.
 - a. Plan the order of attack to take advantage of as many chances as possible, while controlling the number of times defenders get in.
- 7) Follow the breadcrumbs and adjust the plan.
 - a. Count the opponents HCP, shape, tricks

Eliminate Losers:

- 1) Develop a side suit where you can pitch the losers
- 2) Play TOWARD high cards to that their Ace captures only small cards
- 3) Consider playing a loser on a loser, even when defense ruffs
- 4) Consider a ruffing finesse.
- 5) *Block the opponents long suit*
- 6) *Cause the opponents to lead in a way that lets you eliminate a sure loser (end-play)*
- 7) *Squeeze – that is cause the opponents to discard a potential winner ahead of your discard*

Create Winners

- 1) Set up a long suit – only if you can afford to lose as many tricks as it takes. See Danger Hand.
 - a. Ducking an early trick might pay big dividends later.
 - b. Know the basics about suit splits and suit play combinations
- 2) Ruff with trumps from the short hand.
- 3) Ruff with trumps from the long (closed) hand **IF AND ONLY IF** you can draw trumps in Dummy AND you can ruff to shorten the long hand to less than dummy's length. (Requires a good trump split and enough entries to dummy). **Dummy Reversal**
- 4) *Cause the opponents to lead in a way that lets you eliminate a sure loser (end-play)*
- 5) *Squeeze – that is cause the opponents to discard a potential winner ahead of your discard*

When you have a choice of playing 2 or more suits, choose the suit that

- 1) Leaves the defense poorly placed to attack your weakness,
- 2) Keeps open the most options/choices for extra tricks
- 3) Offers most tricks when right, and
- 4) Is consistent with the bidding and known distribution of missing high cards.

Avoid the Danger Hand

Often declarer will have a suit where if the wrong opponent is on lead, declarer will lose the contract. Best to identify ways to postpone letting that opponent win tricks so that declarer can have the time to discard potential losers in that suit somewhere else.

Example Hands

East Deals
None Vul
MPs

| | | |
|-----------|------------------|---------|
| ♠ QJ10643 | N W 18 E S | ♠ A72 |
| ♥ Q8 | | ♥ J1092 |
| ♦ AK | | ♦ 942 |
| ♣ AQ7 | | ♣ KJ6 |

North
Leads ♦J

EW: 4♠, 4N
NS: 2♦

| East | South | West | North |
|------|----------|------|-------|
| Pass | 2♦ | Dbl | Pass |
| 3♥ | Pass | 3♠ | Pass |
| 4♠ | All Pass | | |

HCPs: Declarer West holds 18 HCP and Dummy East holds 9 totaling 27 – a sound contract.

Loser Count: 1 Spade Loser and 2 Heart Losers →

Draw Trump!

Winner Count: 10

Trumps out: 5 so 3-2 split is likely.

Hints from the bidding: North can't have more than 2♦s (South has at least 6)

Hints from the lead: The ♥ honors are split South can't have both. North would lead ♥ from AK...

Key Threat: North has a Singleton ♦ and South has the ♠K.

Plan: Eliminate North's trumps by playing 2 rounds right away – do NOT finesse!

East Deals
None Vul
MPs

| | | |
|--------|---------------|---------|
| ♠ A842 | N W E S | ♠ A72 |
| ♥ KJ93 | | ♥ J1092 |
| ♦ AJ65 | | ♦ 942 |
| ♣ 3 | | ♣ KJ6 |

Contract: 2♥ South

West leads ♠Q

| | |
|---------|---------|
| ♠ 653 | ♠ A72 |
| ♥ Q1084 | ♥ J1092 |
| ♦ 4 | ♦ 942 |
| ♣ A9752 | ♣ KJ6 |

HCPs: South 6 HCP + North 13 = 19 – a good contract.

Loser Count: 2♠s, 1♥. Try to trump 4♣s and 3♦s then 0 ♣&♦!! **DO NOT Draw Trump!**

Winner Count: 3 with 3 or more tricks in trumps.

Trumps out: 5 so 3-2 split is likely.

Hints from the bidding: No opponent bid so neither has an opening hand or easy overcall.

Hints from the lead: East holds the ♠K, and the ♦ honors are split or both with East.

Key Threat: North has a Singleton ♦ and South has ♠K.

Plan: Win the ♠A and play ♣s then ♦s, cross ruffing.

You expect 3 aces and 7 or 8 trumps = 10 or 11 tricks.

NOTE: When cross ruffing always clear side suit winners before ruffing. Opponents will pitch a loser on your ruff and stop the next ruff you try.

NOTE 2: If opponents lead trumps then play your side suits for the tricks they have eliminated. Count: Side suit top tricks + remaining trumps scored separately. If short of your contract, look for more tricks.

| | | | | |
|---------|---------------|------|-----------------|------|
| ♠ Q862 | South | West | North | East |
| ♥ 73 | 1N | Pass | 2♣ ¹ | Pass |
| ♦ KQJ75 | 2♥ | Pass | 3N | Pass |
| ♣ 82 | Passed Out | | 1 = Stayman | |
| | West Leads ♣7 | | | |

| |
|--------|
| ♠ A43 |
| ♥ AKQ5 |
| ♦ 1092 |
| ♣ A64 |

HCPs: South 17 HCP + North 8 = 25 – a minimum game.

Winner Count: 5 with 4 more tricks in ♦s.

Loser Count: 1-3♠s, 1♥. 3-5♣s and 1♦

Hints from the bidding: None

Hints from the lead: West ♣s longer than ♠s. ♣ honors split.

Key Threat: West ♦A with 5+♣.

Plan: Hold off ♣A to 3rd round. Play East for ♦A & ♠K.

What can you learn from the play?