

Suit Contract Play – Crossruffing

Great play of the hand starts with planning your play at trick one. After counting/identifying your losers in the main hand, you should look for ways eliminate them. One way to do this is a technique called cross-ruffing.

The Crossruff Technique

The crossruff technique works when both hands are short in different side suits allowing you to make more tricks by ruffing out these suits instead of drawing trump. Here is a typical example:

Contract: 4 ♠ by West

♠ A K 10 8 3		♠ Q J 9 7 2
♥ 10 9 4 2		♥ 7
♦ K 7 2		♦ A 4
♣ 9		♣ A 9 6 3 2

In this hand drawing trump would leave you with heart and diamond losers in the main hand (West) without a good side suit to pitch them on. Better to not draw trump at all but instead establish a crossruff of hearts/diamonds in the East hand and clubs in the West hand. Once you lose the first heart you can cash your side suit winners and ruff hearts/diamonds in the East versus clubs in the West hand. Even if opponents run out of a side suit their trumps are not big enough to stop you from making the rest of the tricks.

Characteristics of a Good Crossruffing Hand

- **Different Side Suit Shortness in Both Hands** – Ideally opposing side suit singletons (can be doubletons) with the other hand having length in the suit (3-5 cards).
- **Trump Length** – Crossruffs tend to work best when trumps are split evenly between declarer and dummy like 4-4, 4-5, 5-5, etc. Trump breaks like 5-3, 6-3, etc are more amenable to the standard ruffing in the short hand technique.
- **Trump Strength** – To crossruff without drawing trump you will need to be very strong in the trump suit to prevent overruffs by opponents.
- **Top Tricks in the Side Suits** – Hands with “aces and spaces” in the side suits make the best crossruffing hands.

Playing the Crossruff

Cash side suit winners early before commencing a cross-ruff, otherwise the opponents may discard in that side-suit allowing them to trump your winner later.

Defense against the Crossruff

If from the bidding you suspect opponents have a crossruff opportunity, lead trumps whenever possible, especially opening lead, to removing trumps from both opponent's hands.

Suit Contract Play Exercise – Crossruffing

For the following hands identify which technique would work best: crossruffing, ruffing in the short hand or drawing trump and setting up a side suit.

Hand #1 – Contract: 4♥

♠ A 8 5 3 2		♠ 7
♥ K Q 10 9 4		♥ J 8 6 3
♦ 5 3		♦ A 9 8 4
♣ 9		♣ A 9 3 2

Hand #2 - Contract: 4♠

♠ A Q J 6 5		♠ 7 3 2
♥ 9 7		♥ A 10 6 5 2
♦ K 4		♦ A Q 5 3
♣ K Q 5 4		♣ 8

Hand #3- Contract: 4♥

♠ 6 4		♠ A 2
♥ A K 9 6 2		♥ 8 4 3
♦ K 6		♦ Q J 10 7
♣ A 9 7 3		♣ K 8 4 2

Answers:

Hand #1: Crossruffing. You have shortness in two side suits, good trump and no prospects to develop a side suit.

Hand #2: Ruffing in the short hand (Clubs). While you could crossruff clubs and hearts you are better served dumping your heart loser on a good diamond and ruffing losing clubs in the short hand.

Hand #3: Drawing trump and setting up a side suit (diamonds).