

Suit Contract Play – Ruffing in the Short Hand, Dummy Reversal


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 to ruff out losers in the short trump hand.

Ruffing in the Short Hand

One of the most common ways to gain an additional trick is to ruff in the hand containing *fewer* trumps. Ruffing in the short hand gains a trick because the trumps in the long hand remain intact. Ruffing in the longer trump hand does **NOT** gain a trick. You were already getting these tricks. Unnecessarily ruffing in the long hand will only make it easier to lose control of the hand to opponents when they try to run their side suits later in the play.

Here is an example of ruffing in the short hand:

Contract: 4 ♠ by South

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

With South as the main hand, you have no losers in spades (barring a 4-0 break), none in hearts, 3 in diamonds and 1 in clubs. You can eliminate losers by leading toward the ♦K (finesse), ruffing a diamond in the dummy, or by finessing the ♣Q. On a lucky day all three possibilities might work and you could win 12 tricks.

To take advantage of ruffing diamonds in the short hand, should work on *diamonds* first before drawing any trumps. Win the ♥K and lead a diamond to your king. Win the trump shift (best defense) with the king and give up a diamond. Win the trump return in hand and ruff your diamond. This is not a difficult deal, but note that you would fail if you led just *one round* of trumps before leading a diamond.

Ruffing with Equal Trump Length (4-4 or 5-5) – When trumps are equal in length, evaluate both hands as the main hand and choose the one that yields the most tricks.

Suit Contract Play – Ruffing in the Short Hand

For the following hands identify: The main hand, number of losers and if ruffing in the short hand makes sense:

Hand #1 – Contract: 4♥

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

Hand #2 - Contract: 4♠

♠ A 5 4 2	N	♠ K 8 7 6
♥ A 7 3 2	W E	♥ K 4
♦ 7 6	S	♦ Q 8 5 4
♣ 8 6 3		♣ A K Q

Hand #3- Contract: 6♥

♠ A 4 3	N	♠ 6
♥ K Q J 10 6	W E	♥ 8 5 4 3
♦ K 6	S	♦ A Q J 10
♣ A Q 7		♣ K 8 4 2

Answers:

Hand #1: West is the main hand with 5 trumps. West has 5 losers (2S, 1H, 2C). You can easily ruff two clubs in dummy. Taking a club finesse for the king is far riskier than ruffing clubs and should not be attempted. You can also finesse for the king of hearts, and drop a spade loser on the third good diamond in dummy. Ruffing is effective in this hand.

Hand #2: With 4-4 trumps either can be the main hand. Both hands have 5 losers: West (1S, 2H, 2D), East (1S, 4 D) but West is the best choice because you can ruff out two heart losers before defense can draw three rounds of trump. Ruffing is effective in this hand.

Hand #3: West is the main hand with 5 trumps. West has 3 losers (2S, 1H). West could ruff out two spades in dummy or pitch two spades on running diamonds in dummy. Pitching spades on running diamond after drawing trump is the safest way to make the contract because there is no risk of opponents over-ruffing. Do NOT ruff in the short hand in this deal.

Advanced Technique: Dummy Reversal (Exception to Ruffing in the Short Hand)

On some deals it is inconvenient to ruff in the short hand and easy to ruff in the long hand. Unfortunately ruffing in the long hand generally does not gain a trick unless the long hand becomes the short hand after multiple ruffs. Here is an example:

Contract: 4 ♠ by South

♠J 10 3
♥Q 5 3
♦A 9 7 6
♣A Q 4

♠7 5 2
♥A 10 8
♦Q 10 2
♣J 9 8 2



♠9 6
♥K J 9 2
♦K J 8 5 3
♣10 3

♠A K Q 8 4
♥7 6 4
♦4

Lead: ♠2 ♣K 7 6 5

On this deal you have three heart losers and one club loser in the main hand (South). It looks like your best chance for a 10th trick is a 3-3 club break, but a 4-2 break is more likely. What about ruffing your fourth club in dummy? This would work if the opponent who is short in clubs held no more than two trumps, but most of the time it would fail and one of your club winners would be ruffed.

A much better plan is to ruff diamonds in your hand. This requires *three* ruffs to gain only one trick, but it is convenient to do and there are adequate entries to dummy. Win the opening trump lead in your hand and lead a diamond to the ace; ruff a diamond, lead a trump to dummy; ruff a diamond high; club to the queen; ruff a diamond high; club to the ace; draw the last trump. This line of play works on 4-2 club breaks and would produce an *overtrick* if the clubs happened to break 3-3.

The technique of converting the long trump hand into the short trump hand is called a “dummy reversal.” For this technique to work you need be able to ruff enough in the long hand to make it the short hand. You also need some high trump in the short hand to effectively draw trump after you take your ruffs.