



DRAWING TRUMPS -- TO DRAW OR NOT TO DRAW

When you are playing a suit contract, you always should pause and plan the hand before you play a card to the first trick. Thinking about the entire hand first is the key to being a great declarer.

For play at a suit contract always:

1. Think at Trick One,
2. Count losers (in the long trump or master hand)
3. A general guideline is to draw trump first. "Round up the Rascals."

EXCEPTIONS TO THE GUIDELINE

There are reasons for postponing drawing trump, and you should definitely have a reason for delaying drawing trump. The most common reasons to delay drawing trump:

1. There are losers in the master hand that you need to ruff in dummy.
2. You have a trump loser, and you need to discard a fast loser in another suit.
3. You need to use trumps as entries to one hand or the other.
4. Dummy controls a suit with trump and you need to promote tricks in another suit while you still maintain control with dummy's trump.
5. There is only one master trump outstanding.

When playing a suit contract, always (and I mean ALWAYS) ask yourself:

- 1) What will happen if I draw trump?
- 2) What will happen if I do not draw trump?

Let's look at examples for all of the reasons to not draw trump.

1. There are losers in the master hand that you need to ruff in dummy.

Contract: 4♥ Lead: ♦2

Dummy

♠ AK62

♥ T54

♦ A85

♣ 86

Declarer

♠ 943

♥ AQJT8

♦ K4

♣ AQ7

The master hand has 4 losers, 1 ♠, 1♥ and 2 ♣. You can eliminate a club loser by either a winning finesse, or by ruffing the third club in dummy. The finesse is only a 50% chance, and ruffing is a 100% chance, so you want to ruff a club in dummy. You don't want to draw trump, because that would exhaust the trump in dummy, and you could not ruff a club. So the plan is to win the ♦A (note this violates the guideline to win in the short hand first, but you want to be in dummy to take the ♣ finesse). At trick two, lead the ♣8 and finesse the ♣Q. If this loses, win the expected ♦ return with the ♦K. Cash the ♣A and then ruff your third club in dummy with the ♥T. Ruffing high means the defense can't over-ruff except with the ♥K, which you plan as a loser anyway. Now it is time to draw trump. Lead the ♥5 and finesse the ♥Q. If that wins, you can use the ♠A as an entry to dummy to repeat the finesse with the ♥J.

2. You have a trump loser, and you need to discard a fast loser in another suit.

Contract: 4♥ Lead: ♦2

Dummy

♠ KQ62

♥ T54

♦ AQ5

♣ 86

Declarer

♠ JT3

♥ KQJT86

♦ K4

♣ T9

The master hand has 4 losers: 1 ♠, 1 ♥ and 2 ♣. Luckily the defense led a diamond and not a club. If you lead trump right away, the defense will take the ♥A and may figure out they need to try clubs right away. If that happens there is no way to make the hand, the defense will take all 4 of their winners. Here you need to delay drawing trump to cash your diamond winners. So win the ♦K (short hand first), and then play the ♦4 and cash dummy's ♦A and ♦Q and pitch one of your club losers.

3. You need to use trumps as entries to one hand or the other.

Contract: 4♥ Lead: ♦2

Dummy

♠ AK762

♥ AT5

♦ 875

♣ 87

Declarer

♠ 53

♥ KQJ986

♦ AT9

♣ T9

The master hand has 4 losers: 2 ♦, and 2 ♣. Your only hope for an extra winner is to set up dummy's long spade suit. You have 7 spades, so expect the outstanding spades to break 4-2. This means you need to ruff spades twice, so you need three entries to dummy to setup and cash the long spade. You have 1 spade entry, but then you need 2 entries in trump, so you can not pull all the trump right away, you can only afford to draw one round of trump. Win the opening lead with the ♦A, and then cash the ♥K, the ♠A and ♠K, if both opponents followed suit, spades are no worse than 4-2 so the plan will work. Now lead the ♠2 and ruff with the ♥Q. Lead the ♥6 to dummy's ♥T, and then lead the ♠6 and ruff with the ♥J. Now you can finish drawing trump by leading the ♥8 to dummy's ♥A so that you can cash the ♠7, and pitch a losing club from the master hand.

4. Dummy controls a suit with trump and you need to promote tricks in another suit while you still maintain control with dummy's trump.

Contract: 4♥ Lead: ♦2

Dummy

♠ KQJT9

♥ 85

♦ 8

♣ A7

Declarer

♠ 5

♥ AKQJ94

♦ 9763

♣ K3

The master hand has 5 losers: 1 ♠ and 4 ♦. The defense takes the ♦A and returns a trump. If you draw trump and then lead to the ♠K the defense will take the ♠A and cash three more diamonds and set the contract. You need to delay drawing trump and drive out the ♠A while dummy still has a trump to control the diamond suit. If the defense takes the ♠A and leads a ♦, you can ruff in dummy, lead a club to your ♣K and now draw trump. If the defense returns a trump, the spades are established, you can finish drawing trump. Finally, you can lead a club to dummy's ♣A and pitch your losing diamonds on dummy's good spades. You will actually take 11 tricks.

5. There is only one master trump outstanding.

Contract: 6♥ Lead: ♦2

Dummy

♠ A54

♥ 6542

♦ 84

♣ A72

Declarer

♠ 5

♥ AK42

♦ AK632

♣ K3

You have 4 losers, 1♥ (assuming a 3-2 break in hearts) and 3♦. Your only hope is to set up the diamonds by ruffing in dummy, but with only low trump you risk getting over-ruffed, and the defense still getting their master trump. Diamonds are expected to break 4-2, so you will need to ruff two diamonds in dummy, so you can't lead 3 rounds of trump, you will be one trump short for diamond ruffs. The solution is to only partially draw trump, win the ♦A and cash the ♥A and ♥K, leaving the master trump outstanding. If hearts break 4-1, then you can not make the contract. Now cash the ♦K, and ruff a small diamond in dummy. If the defense over-ruffs, it is with their master trump, which was always going to take a trick. Play a club back to your ♣K and ruff a second low diamond in dummy. Finally cash the ♠A and ruff a spade back to your hand to cash the last diamond. The defense only gets one heart trick, making 6♥!