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Play & Learn

Timing is everything

When playing in a suit contract, declarer counts *losers*. There are three basic ways to eliminate losers:

- ❖ Ruff your losers in dummy.
- ❖ Discard your losers on a long side suit in dummy.
- ❖ Finesse to make a high card good that you counted as a loser.

♠ 9 5 4
♥ A 7 4
♦ 5 3 2
♣ A K Q J

♠ K Q J 7 6 2
♥ 6 5 3
♦ K Q
♣ 6 5

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

East follows to West's ♥K lead with the ♥2. Plan your play as declarer.

Your losers are one spade, two hearts and one diamond — one loser more than you can afford. Your options for eliminating a loser are limited. North's strong club suit offers

a parking place for at least one of your losers. What is the best order of plays?

Drawing trump is often declarer's priority. Here, though, drawing trump lets East–West gain the lead. As declarer, you must differentiate between fast losers and slow losers. Fast losers can be lost as soon as the opponents gain the lead. Because of the ♥K opening lead, all of South's losers are fast losers. Drawing trump allows East–West to cash the ♠A, the ♦A and two high hearts to set 4♠. Win the ♥A at trick one and cash three high clubs, discarding a heart loser on the third club. The risk that one of your high clubs will be ruffed is worth taking because reasonable defense will set 4♠ otherwise. Here's the complete deal:

♠ 9 5 4
♥ A 7 4
♦ 5 3 2
♣ A K Q J

♠ 10 3
♥ K Q J 10
♦ A 10 9 4
♣ 9 8 4

♠ A 8
♥ 9 8 2
♦ J 8 7 6
♣ 10 7 3 2

♠ K Q J 7 6 2
♥ 6 5 3
♦ K Q
♣ 6 5

You are South; plan the play on this deal:

See next column

East follows to West's ♦Q lead with the ♦2. Your losers are two spades (fast), one heart (fast) and one diamond (slow). You plan to play the ♣K

♠ 7 6 4
♥ 7 4 2
♦ K 8 3
♣ A Q 4 2

♠ Q 5
♥ K Q J 10 9 8
♦ A 9 7
♣ K 3

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

and then lead the ♣3 to dummy to take the two remaining high clubs, discarding a loser on the third club. While drawing trump does give East–West the lead, they can take only three tricks — the ♥A and the top two spades. As long as you haven't cashed your second high diamond, their diamond trick is a slow loser not yet ready for the taking. Look at the complete deal below to see what happens if you play clubs before drawing trumps:

♠ 7 6 4
♥ 7 4 2
♦ K 8 3
♣ A Q 4 2

♠ K 10 8 3
♥ A 6 5
♦ Q J 10 5
♣ J 8

♠ A J 9 2
♥ 3
♦ 6 4 2
♣ 10 9 7 6 5

♠ Q 5
♥ K Q J 10 9 8
♦ A 9 7
♣ K 3

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