

Play & Learn



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The power of trumps

On the following deal, North-South reach 6♥ against silent opponents. Cover the East-West hands and plan South's play after West leads the ♠K.

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

North-South have everything needed for a crossruff. Dummy can ruff one suit, declarer can ruff another. Before going ahead with a crossruff, count the tricks you can win to make sure you will have enough to make your contract. You expect to win two clubs, one diamond, one spade and *eight* top hearts (by ruffing four diamonds and three spades and cashing the one remaining high heart). What can go wrong?

Your trump suit is strong enough to prevent West from overruffing diamonds, but your contract isn't safe unless you play your cards in the right order. Suppose you win the ♠A and begin the crossruff by leading to the ♦A, ruffing a diamond, ruffing a spade and continuing to crossruff. As you do so, West will make three

discards. A piece of advice for playing a successful crossruff is to cash side-suit winners early. You don't want to give West a chance to discard clubs and later ruff the ♣A or ♣K.

The next deal offers an interesting opportunity. Cover the East-West hands and plan South's play in 4♥ after West leads the ♦Q. East-West win the first two diamond tricks without making dummy's ♦K good and then lead a third diamond, which you ruff.

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

South's losers are one spade, two diamonds, likely one club (because the odds favor a 4-2 split over a 3-3 split) and no hearts as long as the suit splits 3-2. So what is your best plan for making 4♥? Hint: You can't avoid the spade loser, so focus on clubs.

If you decided your only hope is a 3-3 club split, try again. A 3-3 club split will occur about 36% of the time. What can you do to give yourself an extra chance?

One way to avoid a loser is to ruff

it in dummy. Dummy has three clubs, declarer has four, and it's that fourth club we are hoping not to lose. To accomplish this, you must leave a trump in dummy.

Does this mean you should play clubs before drawing *any* trumps? That won't work on a 4-2 club split because the defender holding a doubleton club will ruff the third club. Your best hope is to draw two rounds of trumps with the ♥A and ♥Q, saving your king to draw the last trump later. Play clubs next, leaving the last heart out. If clubs split 3-3, your low club is good and you will play the ♥K to draw the last trump and claim, conceding a spade. If clubs split 4-2, you will use dummy's ♥4 to ruff it. Did you guess that the lowly ♥4 would be the hero of the day? Notice how important it was to play two rounds of hearts first. West would ruff the third club if you had not done that. Even an expert would need luck to make this contract. If West had been dealt the third heart, the plan would have failed. □