



# Play & Learn


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## Trump promotions

You are East defending against 4♠ after the auction shown. Partner leads the ♣8. Cover up the West and South hands and plan your defense. Is there any hope of defeating 4♠?

West	North	East	South
	1♦	2♣	2♠
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

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

Analyze the opening lead: Partner surely is leading from shortness — a doubleton or singleton — so you will win two or three club tricks. You win the ♣J and cash another high club. Partner shows out. You have three club tricks. Where can you find one more trick?

North tells you where it *can't* be found — not in diamonds and not in

hearts. That leaves only the trump suit. You can peek at West's hand now. He does not have a natural trump trick because his spades will fall when declarer leads the suit from the top. You can change that by leading a fourth club.

Offering declarer the chance for a ruff-sluff is not usually recommended, but doing so here promotes West's ♠J into the setting trick. If declarer ruffs with the ♠10, West overruffs. Ruffing higher turns West's ♠J into a trump trick on power. Discarding to ruff in dummy lets West ruff with the ♠J.

To be clear, I am not advocating offering declarer ruff-sluffs willy-nilly. You made the play because you could see no tricks were coming in diamonds or hearts. Rather than hoping that partner had a trump trick, you took action to turn West's ♠J into a winner.

Declarer isn't always helpless against a trump promotion. On the next deal, plan your play as South in 4♠ after the same auction as in the first deal, West leads the ♣8. You lose the first two tricks to East as West follows with the 2 at trick two. East continues with a third high club. How do you plan to make 4♠?

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

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

Analyze the lead. The ♣8 appears

to be from shortness. West's second card confirms that. You have already lost two tricks and still must lose a diamond and possibly a spade. That's too many.

You could try ruffing the third club high, hoping that East holds the ♠Q so that West can't overruff. The downside of that plan is that if West does overruff, you have no way to eliminate the diamond loser, and 4♠ will be defeated. Is there a better option?

What if you don't ruff the third club but discard your diamond loser? That eliminates the possibility of an overruff if East leads a fourth club. In such a case, let the lead ride around to dummy. If West ruffs, overruff with the ♠7 or ♠K, depending on what card West plays. If West doesn't ruff, the ♠2 will do. If East leads anything else, you win and play a top spade. If both defenders follow suit, draw the only outstanding trump and claim. If West holds all three missing spades you can avoid losing to the ♠Q by finessing. If East has all three spades you were destined to go down but can feel good knowing you gave it your best shot. West's hand:

♠ Q 5   ♥ 9 8 7 4 3 2   ♦ 8 5 4   ♣ 8 2

Discarding the ♦3 was the right choice. If you had ruffed, West would overruff while dummy helplessly followed suit. Pitching a card you had to lose anyway avoided the need to worry about the location of the ♠Q on most trump splits. In bridge, you're not obligated to ruff when you can't follow suit. Sometimes discarding a card you have to lose anyway is a better option. □