



Play & Learn

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Hot potatoes

Last month, we saw that having one or more extra winners in a lopsided suit where dummy has greater length than declarer can provide a place for declarer to discard losers in another suit. Let's plan the play on two deals where North-South reach 4♥ by South in an uncontested auction.

Dlr: South ♠ 7 6 4 2
 Vul: N-S ♥ 7 4 2
 ♦ K 8 3
 ♣ A Q 4

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

♠ Q 5
♥ K Q J 10 9 8
♦ A 9 7
♣ K 3

West leads the ♦ Q. We see four losers in South, the long trump hand: two spades, one heart and one diamond. One loser must be eliminated. Notice the lopsided club suit where declarer will not be able to follow suit when dummy's third club is cashed. We can discard a loser on dummy's third club.

Should we draw trump first or discard first? Drawing trump gives East-West the lead with the ♥ A. Can they take three more tricks at that point or will we still have a loser left to discard?

When we count our losers, note which are fast losers that our opponents can take when they have the lead and which are slow losers that aren't ready for the defenders to take yet. Along with the trump ace, both spade

losers are fast losers. Our diamond loser is slow as long as we don't cash our second diamond trick. We can draw trump and then discard the diamond loser on dummy's third club.

To ensure an entry to dummy's third club, cash the ♣ K, the winner in the shorter hand first. On this deal, we would not have succeeded if we had tried to cash all three winning clubs before drawing trump. West would have ruffed the third club and East-West would have defeated 4♥ with that club ruff, two spades and the ♥ A. It's a good thing we avoided taking any unnecessary chances and drew trump first.

Fast losers are like hot potatoes. You have to handle them carefully for fear you will get burned. On this deal, we gave up the lead to the trump ace, but didn't get burned because we had time to dump the slow diamond loser after drawing trump. When our plan involves discarding a fast loser, we might have a good reason to delay drawing trump.

Dlr: North ♠ A 8 4
 Vul: None ♥ J 10 9 2
 ♦ A K J 5
 ♣ 4 3

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

♠ 7 6 5
♥ A Q 8 7 4
♦ 6
♣ K Q J 10

West leads the ♠ Q. South has four

losers: two spades (fast because of the spade opening lead), one fast club and possibly the ♥ K. Again, one loser must be avoided. Some declarers might rely on a finesse to avoid losing the ♥ K. Finesses work 50% of the time, but not this time. After taking the ♥ K, East-West can quickly cash two spades and the ♣ A to set 4♥. Because finesses are as likely to lose as they are to win, we rely on them only when we have no better line of play.

What about discarding a loser on dummy's second diamond winner? The only useful discard on the ♦ K is a hot-potato spade, so the discard must be taken before losing the lead. Finessing hearts risks losing the lead and both spade losers, so we have to delay drawing trump.

While a defender could ruff the second diamond, the chance of that happening is less than the chance of the heart finesse losing. Even if the second diamond is ruffed, we can still fall back on the heart finesse.

When the opponents hold three or more cards in a suit, the Odd-Even Rule suggests that an odd number of missing cards is most likely to split as evenly as possible, and an even number of missing cards is most likely to split one off from exactly even.

With eight diamonds missing, the most likely split of the defenders' diamonds is 5-3, so delaying drawing trump to cash the ♦ A K gives us the best chance of making 4♥. Once the spade loser is discarded, it's safe to draw trump.