

Explaining 'frozen' suits

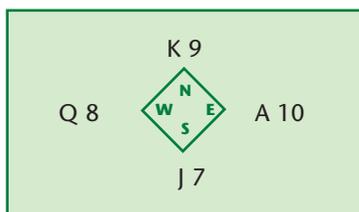
Send your questions to the Editor, or e-mail
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GEORGE Jarvis from Sheffield writes:
I have overheard some players at my club discussing 'frozen suits', but am unclear what they are talking about. What is meant by frozen suits, and what does one do with them?

Dear George,
While the term 'frozen suit' may not be one that you are used to, I suspect that the ideas involved will be relatively familiar to you. I shall attempt to show you how they work with a few examples.

What is a frozen suit?

As declarer or defender, one often encounters suit combinations in which the partnership that first plays the suit must do so to their detriment and their opponents' advantage. The identification of such 'frozen' suit combinations is a key stage when building one's recognition of the potential for an elimination and end-play. One of the skills required involves being able to judge the best point at which to lose the lead to result in the most beneficial play by the opposing side. For example:



In this two-card ending, if South has to tackle this suit, he will be unable to win a trick (assuming that West covers South's jack with his queen). However, if either East or West is forced to lead the suit, South will be able to win a trick (if West is leading, South makes a trick by covering the card that West leads).

Are the following suit combinations 'frozen'?

In each case, South being the declarer, assess how many tricks can be won depending on which player starts the suit.

| | | | |
|----|---------|--------|-----------|
| a) | J 7 4 | | |
| | K 10 5 | | A 9 8 3 |
| | | Q 6 2 | |
| b) | A J 5 | | |
| | Q 8 6 3 | | K 9 4 |
| | | 10 7 2 | |
| c) | Q 7 6 | | |
| | A 9 5 4 | | J 10 3 |
| | | K 8 2 | |
| d) | K 10 4 | | |
| | Q 7 5 3 | | A 8 2 |
| | | J 9 6 | |
| e) | A 10 | | |
| | K 8 7 4 | | J 9 5 3 2 |
| | | Q 6 | |

a) YES. If declarer has to lead the suit, he will win no tricks, assuming the second player plays low. However, if either defender leads the suit, declarer will make a trick assuming he follows the same principle.

b) YES. If declarer leads the suit, he will only win one trick, assuming that each defender only uses his honour to beat an honour in the dummy or declarer's hand. If either defender leads the suit, declarer will be able to win a second trick. This will come by force if East leads the suit, or by playing low and then later finessing the jack if West leads the suit.



David Bakhshi

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c) YES. Declarer can only make one trick as long as West saves his ace to beat South's king. Declarer will still make just one trick if East leads the suit, but if West can be forced to lead the suit, then South will win a second trick.

d) NO. Whether the suit is led by a defender or declarer, two tricks can be made by finessing West for the queen (assuming that South has sufficient entries to lead the suit from hand twice). Declarer will only be held to one trick if he starts the suit from the North hand.

e) YES. Declarer can only win one trick if he attacks the suit (assuming that West covers South's card). If West leads the suit, a second trick can be won by covering West's card. If East leads the suit, a second trick can also be won as long as South guesses to play low if East leads any card lower than the jack.

What does one do if one recognises a suit as being 'frozen'?

As one becomes familiar with combinations such as a), b), c), and e), the next step is to try to engineer situations in which the opponents can be made to lead the suit first. When playing with a trump suit, this is often achieved by eliminating the potential for an opponent to lead any other suit and typically requires declarer to have at least one trump left in each hand. In a no-trump contract, similar principles apply, except that declarer will need to be in a position where he can afford to lose the lead without then losing more tricks than his contract will allow for. If this is possible, having taken the tricks that they can, the defenders will be forced to attack the remaining suit to declarer's advantage. □