

# Declarer Play in Suit Contracts

When the opening lead is faced and before playing a card from dummy:

## COUNT and ASSESS

### Top tricks

- Count your combined winners in both hands
- Decide how many more tricks you need to make the contract.

### Extra tricks?

- Look for extra tricks that you may be able to establish by:
  - Ruffing in the short trump hand
  - Finessing
  - Establishing a side suit

## THREATS

- Count your losers – do you need to discard losers on winners right away, before losing the lead?

**Contract:** 4♠

**Lead:** ♣K

**Declarer**

**Dummy**

♠ Q J 5 4 2

♠ K 10 6 3

♥ K 7

♥ A Q 5

♦ K J 7

♦ Q 5 3

♣ A 3 2

♣ 10 9 5

- There are 4 losers (missing the ♠A, ♦A and ♣KQ).
- You must eliminate one club loser by a quick discard before drawing trumps (this will mean losing the lead because you are missing the ♠A).
- Avoid blocking hearts by first playing the honour (♥K) from the short hand.
- If your opponents suspect that you will need ruffs (in dummy) to make your contract, they will attack dummy's trumps at every opportunity. Bear this in mind when drawing trumps. If you keep just one of dummy's trumps back for ruffing and the defence win the lead then they are likely to lead trumps to prevent your ruff.
- Does the auction or opening lead suggest that one or other opponent has shortage and may be looking for an early ruff.

## PLAN and EXECUTE

Make your plan right away. Decide the order of execution – drawing trumps, discarding losers, which winners to establish first - and be prepared to adapt your plan as the play progresses.

### Managing Trumps

#### Drawing trumps

Plan always to draw trumps **unless you have a good reason not to**. Keep a careful count and stop drawing trumps when your opponents have none left. Even when the opponents have several trumps better than yours, it is often better to draw their trumps than allow them to make them separately in a cross ruff. When there is just one missing trump left and it is the best trump, leave it out. (Rule of 1). There is little point in wasting your trumps to get rid of a trump that will win a trick anyway

Ruffing in the short trump hand is probably the single most effective way of developing extra tricks when declaring a suit contract. It is often misleadingly referred to as 'ruffing in dummy', although on occasion declarer may have fewer trumps than dummy, and sometimes declarer's hand will have the same number of trumps as dummy and have side suit shortage which makes it more suitable for being used as the ruffing hand

Ruffing in the long hand rarely produces extra tricks. Two exceptions are:

- Dummy Reversal (see handout)
- Setting up a side suit (see handout)

### Managing Entries

Be careful of which hand to win the opening lead in if you have a choice - (you may need an entry card later)

Beware of creating blockages. If you are playing out a suit with high cards in both hands, lead high from the shorter hand and low from the longer hand.