

REVIEW: TYPES OF HANDS (TRUMP CONTRACTS) & DECLARER PLAY

By Maritha Pottenger (maritha@pacbell.net)

When dummy comes down, count your tricks and your possible tricks. When playing a trump contract, it will help if you identify the type of hand with which you are dealing. Each type has a different strategy. Your mnemonic is **CELS: cross-ruff; end play; long suit; and short trump hand.**

1. Develop Long Suit

When you or dummy has a long, side suit (usually 5 or more cards), consider whether your best bet is to set up that long suit. That might entail just cashing the top cards and then running the suit (after trumps are drawn). It might require you to ruff one (or two or three) rounds of the long suit in order to set it up. You will also have to determine whether or not you can pull **all** outstanding trumps **before** setting up your long suit; whether you can pull one or two rounds of trumps before setting up your long suit; or whether you need to set up your long suit and pull trumps more or less at the same time (for reasons of transportation).

When considering running your long suit, decide whether you must lose one (or more) tricks in that suit early—to preserve transportation. Check the spots and do any necessary unblocking so that you don't end up stuck in the wrong hand. Sometimes you have to take finesses to develop long suit.

2. High Cross Ruff

Clues that a high cross ruff is best include: (a) you have really good spots in your trumps in both hands; (b) you have shortness (usually a singleton or a void) in both Declarer and in dummy in two (or three) different suits; (c) ruffing in the short-trump hand will not generate enough tricks; (d) there is no long suit to set up.

When doing a high cross ruff, be sure to cash all your side-suit winners **first**. (In Swiss Teams or rubber bridge or an aggressive matchpoint game or slam, cash only enough side suit winners to insure your contract before beginning your high cross ruff.) If you have one or two low trumps, get those ruffs in as early as possible. Do NOT pull trumps at all. Just ruff in Dummy; ruff in your hand; ruff in Dummy, etc.

3. Ruff in the Short Trump Hand

Clues that you need to trump in short-trump hand: (a) you have losers in long trump hand that cannot be discarded on other winners; (b) you have shortness in a suit in the short-trump hand which is longer (with potential losers) in the long-trump hand; (c) you don't have a long suit to develop OR ruffing in the short-trump hand AND developing your long suit will generate more tricks.

When taking ruffs in the short-trump hand, you must decide whether you can afford to pull zero, one, two, or three rounds of trumps before taking your ruffs in the short-trump hand. Check your transportation carefully to make sure you can trump your loser(s) in the short-trump hand and get back to the long-trump hand to finish pulling trump and cash other winners. In some cases, you are willing to risk an overruff of the card you are trumping in the short-trump hand *if that was a trump trick the opponents would be getting anyway!* Remember that Declarer will be the short-trump hand in some cases (e.g., transfers over a no trump opening).

4. End Play(s)

Clues that you should be looking for an end play include: (a) mirror distribution (or almost mirror) between Declarer and Dummy; (b) bidding that makes it likely a finesse is not going to work; (c) certain card combinations with which you would really like your opponents to break the suit rather than having to do it yourself (e.g., Q32 opposite J45; A109 opposite KJ8; etc.). See End Play Spreadsheet for longer list.

When arranging for an end play, you need: (a) trumps in both hands; (b) eliminate one or two side suits in both hands; (b) throw in an opponent in 3rd (evenly divided) side suit on trick(s) that eliminates that suit

from both hands. Then, any return your opponent makes is advantageous to your side (usually through a ruff-and-sluff, a free finesse, or breaking a suit for you so that you can avoid a possible loser or two).

5. **Mixed**

Many hands are a blend of the above types and you have to combine your strategies as you feel is best.