

PLAY (AND DEVELOP) YOUR LONGEST SUIT FIRST

by Maritha

Long suits are valuable sources of tricks in both no trump and suit contracts. Usually it behooves us to go after our longest suits first. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule.

Do NOT Attack Your Longest Suit in No Trump if You Do Not Have the Time

When the opponents have attacked a suit in which you have only two stoppers and they have a lot of length, your options are limited. You cannot afford to develop a suit in which you need to knock out two cards (e.g., an Ace and a King). By the time you have forced out that Ace and King, the opponents would have removed your second stopper in their long suit and cashed 3 or more length tricks. Sometimes you have to go after shorter suits because you don't have the tempo to attack your longer suits.

Playing on your longest suit might be too dangerous (could lead to defeat).

Suppose your only stopper in LHO's long suit is an Ace. You duck twice to cut communications between the opponents. Now, LHO is the dangerous hand. If your longest suit involves a finesse in which LHO would play 4th, you really do NOT want to risk it. (If the finesse loses, you will not make your contract.) You should look for an alternative, even if a shorter suit. You can afford to finesse where RHO (the "safe" hand) plays 4th. So, your game-going tricks may come through attacking a shorter suit.

Do NOT Attack Your Longest Suit in No Trump if that does NOT attack the Entry to the Dangerous Hand.

When one hand (usually LHO who made the opening lead) is the dangerous hand, you need to consider entries to that dangerous hand. Suppose you have only two stoppers in LHO's suit and you need to knock out an Ace in your longest suit, and take a finesse in the shorter suit, but that finesse allows LHO to play 4th hand. You should take the finesse in the shorter suit FIRST—because if it loses, the dangerous hand will win a trick while you still have ONE stopper left. If you force out the Ace in the longest suit first, RHO can return LHO's long suit and force out your last stopper. Then when you finesse into the dangerous hand (dangerous hand playing 4th), if the finesses loses, you go down. So, attack the sure entry to the danger hand FIRST!