

Improve your bridge with me

By Migry Zur Campanile



When I started learning bridge, I was often reminded never to delay pulling trumps in suit contracts because “the world is full of desolate bridge players looking in vain for new partners after they forgot to draw trumps”.

It was very sound advice but like all such advice it needs to be carefully applied. There are many situations where the drawing of trumps has to be timed correctly, especially when we can see a concrete risk of losing control of the hand. Besides the inevitable bad result, don't you think it is embarrassing to play in a suit contract and suddenly those feisty opponents have more trumps than you, or worse, have run you out of trumps, have the lead and are taking tricks like crazy?

In order to understand the techniques of avoiding a force, you have to be aware that strong defenders frequently try to force the hand with the long trump to shorten itself by ruffing prematurely. In other words, if you are playing a 4-3 or a 5-3 trump fit, they will attempt to shorten your four or five card trump holding, by leading a suit in which dummy (or the side with the short trumps) still has to follow to.

It is easy to see that if both you and dummy were void in the suit led you would avoid the force by simply ruffing from the side that has the short trumps.

This simple fact points us towards the first principle we should follow to help retaining control:

in order to keep control of the hand we should try, whenever possible, to rid dummy of the cards of the suit the opponents lead to force us, so that we can ruff the suit with dummy's short trumps.

This can be done by:

(1) refusing to ruff in the long hand until

dummy is void, discarding losers instead (2) discarding dummy's cards in the force suit on extra winners from the long hand.

Let's take a look at a couple of hands which show the importance of accurate timing and of keeping at least one trump in dummy to avoid the force.

♠ 753	♠ AQ6	♠ 10982
♥ 72	♥ AQ9	♥ 653
♦ KQ1098	♦ 765	♦ A432
♣ QJ9	♣ A876	♣ K10
	♠ KJ4	
	♥ KJ1084	
	♦ J	
	♣ 5432	

We declare 4♥ on the ♦K lead and we can count nine tricks: five hearts, three spades and one club. Our tenth trick will need to come from the club suit, assuming that they split 3-2.

Can you afford to draw all the trumps first? Only if you fancy looking for a new partner!

Let us think this through: if you draw three rounds of trumps you will have only one trump left. The opponents must be given the lead twice in clubs, therefore you will run out of trumps after giving up the lead the first time in clubs. What a shame.

The answer is to draw no more than two rounds of trumps, leaving one in dummy and two in the closed hand. Now we can play ♣A and a club. The opponents will continue diamonds, forcing you to ruff.

Assuming you have drawn two rounds of trumps then you, dummy, and West remain with one trump each and both you and dummy are void in diamonds. After a second club is conceded the defense is helpless. The defender who takes the

second club can either return a diamond for you to ruff in dummy, come back to hand with a spade, draw the last trump and claim, or play back the last trump with the same result.

This hand may seem easy but it pinpoints another vital principle to help us avoid a force: ***Before deciding whether and how to draw trumps we must check how many times we will have to surrender the lead and to leave us enough trumps to remove the opponents' trumps and still have enough to ruff the suit they lead.***

Here is one last example of this sort of play:

♠ A876		
♥ 976		
♦ 987		
♣ A53		
♠ KQJ104	W N E	♠ 932
♥ 1084	W N E	♥ K532
♦ 53	W N E	♦ J1042
♣ KJ10	W N E	♣ 42
		♠ 5
		♥ AQJ
		♦ AKQ6
		♣ Q9876

The bidding goes:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♠	1NT	Pass	2♦
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♦
Pass	5♣	All Pass	

West leads the ♠K and you can see that you have at least two losers in the trump suit and two potential losers outside: a heart and a diamond. The correct way to play the hand is to take the lead with ♠A, immediately finesse in hearts and duck a club. The opponents will most likely play back another spade which you ruff. Then you enter dummy with the ♣A, take a second heart finesse and run the diamonds in order to ruff the fourth one in dummy. Obviously west can ruff the third round of the suit but he will have to do that with his high trump and afterwards you have your contract in the bag. If you instead had carelessly played ♣A and a club early, West would have been able to cash his second trump winner thus stopping you from ruffing your diamond loser in dummy.