

SHOULD I OR SHOULDN'T I?

DRAWING TRUMPS AT BRIDGE

Marc Smith



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Master Point Press
214 Merton St. Suite 205
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M4S 1A6
(647) 956-4933

info@masterpointpress.com

www.masterpointpress.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.teachbridge.com
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Introduction

The old story tells of two derelicts meeting under the Arches on the Embankment. One says to the other, “Didn’t you used to play high stakes rubber bridge?”

“Yes,” replies the second man, “but I never learned to draw trumps and I lost everything. Did the same thing happen to you...”

“Oh, no,” answered the first bum, “I always drew trumps, and that’s what led to my downfall.”

The moral of the story, of course, is that your results will improve significantly by identifying those deals on which you should draw trumps and those on which you should not do so.

I have read numerous books on declarer play, and most of them seem to contain hand after hand illustrating the exceptions to the norm. My teaching experience, though, suggests that what most players really need is practise at those more mundane deals that crop up day after day. Indeed, many of the hands you will encounter in these pages require little more than counting your tricks.

Not that all of the deals here are ‘easy’: what would be the point of reading a book if you could already solve every problem? Some of the deals are more difficult, particularly if you have not seen the position before. Hopefully, though, having followed the logic behind the analysis of those problems here, you will then be able to come up with the winning play when you encounter similar situations at the table.

The deals here can mostly be solved by straightforward planning. In fact, forget I used the word ‘planning’, since even that seems to frighten people. Instead, let’s simply call it ‘thinking’.

If you want to test yourself as we go, cover the E/W cards and decide how you would play before reading on. At the end of each chapter, you will also find some quiz hands.

Enjoy!

M.S.

This book is dedicated to the memory of two of my former bridge partners who are sadly no longer with us. Both were not only excellent bridge players, but also wonderful human beings. They may be gone, but neither will ever be forgotten by anyone lucky enough to have known them.

To both Peter Czerniewski and to Jane Preddy I would like to say: “Thank you, it was a real pleasure”.

M.S. 2016

Chapter 1 – “Should I Draw Trumps?”

The simple answer to the question is: “Probably, yes”. On the majority of deals played in a suit contract, the best play is for declarer to draw trumps as soon as possible. Far more contracts fail because declarer does not draw trumps quickly than because he does so when he should not do so. At the risk of repeating myself then, let me over-emphasize this point right at the beginning: **“On most deals, you should draw trumps immediately”**.

Of course, every beginner quickly realizes that there are plenty of exceptions to this ‘rule’ (which is why I can write a whole book on the subject). We’ll meet the most common exceptions later, but for now just remember that they are called ‘exceptions’ for a reason.

The winning line of play on most of the deals you will come across at the table is straightforward: draw trumps, set up side-suit tricks, cash winners, take ruffs and claim your contract. The objective is to recognize the exceptions but otherwise to follow that basic formula.

Always remember too, that you chose to play in a suit contract for a reason: **“the trump suit belongs to the declarer”**. Of course, the defenders have the opening lead so they may choose to begin the trump-drawing process by leading the suit. Indeed, there are still some players out there who think they should lead a trump whenever they cannot think of anything else to lead! Whether you take advantage of this usually-misguided notion by continuing to draw trumps or not, though, will generally be up to you as declarer.

Whether you are playing in a suit or in notrumps, it is imperative that you make some sort of plan before you play that first card from dummy. In this opening chapter we will look at how you should actually go about making that plan. The first step in a suit contract is to start by asking yourself one simple question: **“If I draw trumps, will I have enough tricks for my contract?”**

Let’s start with some excitement – a grand slam. Cover the E/W cards and decide how you will play:

E/W Vul: Dealer South

♠ 8 6 4 2
 ♥ J
 ♦ A K Q 4
 ♣ 9 8 7 2

♠ 7
 ♥ Q 8 7 6 5 4 3
 ♦ 8
 ♣ Q 10 5 3



♠ 10 9 3
 ♥ 10
 ♦ 10 9 7 5 3 2
 ♣ K J 6 4

♠ A K Q J 5
 ♥ A K 9 2
 ♦ J 6
 ♣ A 6

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
—	—	—	1♠
Pass	4♥	Pass	5♣
Pass	5♦	Pass	5♥
Pass	6♦	Pass	7♠
All Pass			

You bid unopposed to Seven Spades via a splinter bid and an exchange of cue-bids. West leads the ♦8. How do you set about making all thirteen tricks?

Let's count the losers in the long trump hand (South) – two hearts and one club. Perhaps your immediate reaction is that dummy's singleton means that you can ruff the two heart losers. That leaves you with just a club loser to deal with, and that can be thrown on dummy's third high diamond.

Bidding and making a grand slam is always a thrill, so you quickly win the opening lead with dummy's ♦A, cross to your hand with the ♥A, and lead one of your heart losers, ruffing in dummy. Disaster — East overruffs! He returns a diamond and West ruffs. Now comes a third round of hearts. You ruff forlornly in dummy, but East overruffs with the ♠9. You manage to make the remaining tricks but your grand

slam has gone three down. What foul distribution. What went wrong?

Let's try counting those losers again – two hearts and one club. How can we dispose of those three losers? Dummy has three diamond winners, but the ♦J in your hand is also a winner, which means that two of your losers can be discarded on dummy's high diamonds. Remember to ask yourself: "Do I have enough tricks if I draw trumps?" Let's count winners now – five trumps in hand, four diamonds, two high hearts and the ace of clubs comes to twelve. This means that you will still need to ruff one heart in dummy to bring your total to thirteen, but is there any rush to take that ruff?

Win the opening lead in your hand with the jack of diamonds (to avoid blocking the suit) and immediately lay down a high trump. When both defenders follow, you now know that you can afford draw all of the missing trumps and still have one left in dummy to ruff your last heart loser.

Having drawn the rest of the defenders' trumps, scoring the remaining tricks will then be plain sailing: grand slam bid and made.

The small slam on our next deal may look straightforward, but there are still some pitfalls to be avoided:

<p>♠ 3 ♥ J 9 4 ♦ A 9 8 5 3 ♣ J 10 9 3</p>		<p>♠ 10 9 7 4 ♥ Q 10 8 7 5 3 2 ♦ 2 ♣ 7</p>
<p>♠ K Q 6 ♥ 7 ♦ K Q 7 4 ♣ A 8 5 4 2</p> <p>♠ A J 8 5 2 ♥ A K 6 ♦ J 10 6 ♣ K 6</p>		

You quickly reach Six Spades and West leads the ♣J. How do you plan to make twelve tricks?

There are only two obvious losers. You cannot avoid conceding a trick to the ace of diamonds, so the question is how to dispose of your losing heart. You have obviously noticed dummy's shortage so perhaps you decide that you can simply take care of your heart loser by taking a ruff? For many declarers, that is as far as their planning would go, and with fatal consequences.

Take a look at the defenders' hands. Can you see what will happen if you win the opening club lead with dummy's ace, cross to a top heart in your hand, and ruff your losing heart in dummy?

You will be able to cash dummy's king and queen of spades, but there will then be no safe route to your hand in order to draw East's remaining trumps. If you try to get back to hand with a diamond, West will win and give his partner a ruff in one of the minors. If you attempt to cross in clubs, East will ruff, play a diamond to his partner's ace, and get a diamond ruff to put you two down.

"Well, that was a frightfully unlucky distribution, partner."

Many declarers would then go on to the next deal bemoaning their bad luck and never realizing that the slam could, and should, have been made. Let's go back to trick one and ask the essential question – "Do I have enough tricks if I draw trumps?"

Counting tricks, you can see five trumps in hand, the A-K of hearts and the A-K of clubs on top – that's nine. You can also establish three diamond tricks by force, by knocking out the ace. That brings your total to the required twelve. So, let's win the opening lead and draw trumps: not quite so fast – you have not quite finished your thinking yet. There is one more question to be asked before you play to trick one – where are you going to win the opening club lead?

If you wondered, "Does it matter?" you need to take a second look. Remember that in the plan you just made, you counted three diamond tricks. Are you sure that you can reach the long diamond winner once you have set it up? Suppose you win the opening lead with dummy's ace of clubs, draw trumps in four rounds, and then lead diamonds. If the defenders hold up their ace of diamonds until the third round, your twelfth trick will then be stranded in an entry-less dummy. Your only possible late entry to dummy is the ace of clubs, so you must be careful not to waste that card at trick one.

Having counted that you have twelve tricks AND made a plan for

cashing them all, you are now ready to play. Win the opening club lead in your hand with the king, draw trumps, and then lead diamonds until a defender takes his ace. Nothing can now stop you from throwing your heart loser on dummy's fourth diamond and the slam is yours.

It is worth mentioning one final point of technique here. In the description of the play in the previous paragraph, I simply said 'draw trumps' and 'lead diamonds'. In both cases, though, it is important that you play the cards in those two suits in the right order. Let's look at that trump suit in isolation:

♠ K Q 6



♠ A J 9 5 2

When you draw trumps here, you should play dummy's king and queen on the first two rounds of the suit. If you play the ace or the jack on either of the first two rounds of trumps, you block the suit and risk getting stuck in dummy with an enemy trump still at large. (Yes, on this occasion you would survive because you have a heart entry to your hand, but you will not always be so endowed.)

Getting used to cashing suits without creating a blockage is just a good habit to get into. Note also that it does not matter which honors are in which hand. The spade suit could just as easily have been:

♠ K J 6



♠ A Q 9 5 2

♠ A K 6



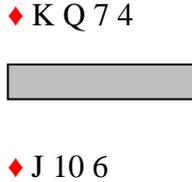
♠ Q J 9 5 2

or

Do these three spade layouts look different?
 Yes, they do, but in practical terms they are identical. In each of the layouts, you have four touching honors and each of those honors is therefore of equal value. What is important is that you cash the honors

in the hand with short trumps first in order to avoid blocking the suit.

This concept comes up repeatedly and it is an important one to understand, so let's look at a second example – the diamonds on the deal above.

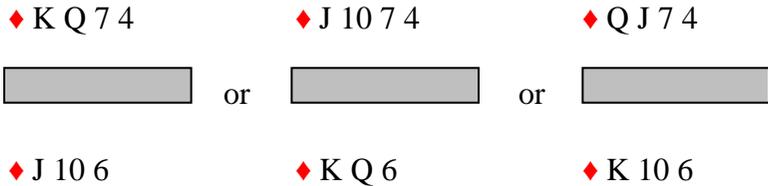


Once again, you need to start by first playing the honors from the short suit (this time, your hand).

To see why, suppose you lead the ♦6 to dummy's king and then play a low diamond back to your jack. West can now win his ace and play a second round of clubs, removing your outside entry to dummy. You are left with two diamond winners, the ten and the queen, but you will not be able to get to dummy to enjoy the second of these.

If, instead, you start by leading the ♦J and (if that holds) continue with the ♦10, it matters not how the defenders' diamonds are divided, when they take their ace, nor what they do next. Whatever happens, you will have a diamond winner in dummy on which to discard your heart loser and, if needed, an outside entry to reach that winner.

This diamond suit is another example of a layout that can appear in different guises:



These diamond layouts may look different, but the principles are the same as we saw with the spade suit above. Your touching honors are all of equal value. In each case, you should start by leading the honors in the hand with the shorter holding first. Not doing so risks blocking the suit.

The urge to take apparently cheap ruffs in dummy can be a difficult one to overcome. Let's see how you cope with temptation on another slam hand:

Both Vul: Dealer South

<p>♠ A J 9 7 2 ♥ K 7 2 ♦ Q 10 8 3 ♣ 7</p>		<p>♠ K 10 8 6 3 ♥ 6 ♦ J 6 ♣ 9 8 4 3 2</p>
<p>♠ Q 5 4 ♥ A J 9 8 4 ♦ A K 9 4 ♣ K</p>		

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1♥
1♠	3♠	4♠	6♥
All Pass			

Although the opponents manage to elevate the bidding to the 4-level on the first round, your partner's jump cue-bid shows a shortage in spades and agrees hearts so you quickly reach slam.

West opens the defense with the ♣7.

How do you play?

If you start by counting losers in your hand, you'll see two diamonds, three spades and perhaps a trump too. That seems like an awful lot when you are in a slam contract, so your first inclination may be to reduce that number quickly by ruffing spades in dummy.

Let's see how the play might go: win with the king of clubs and ruff a spade. Lead a diamond to the ace and ruff a second spade. Now you try to cross back to hand via the trump finesse, but West wins with the

♥K and returns a second trump, East discarding a club. When you next cash one of dummy's top clubs, throwing your last spade, West ruffs. He exits with a spade, which you can ruff in hand, but you still have two diamonds to lose. Oops! Three down.

Let us now go back to the beginning and ask the all-important question — “If I draw trumps, will I have enough tricks for my contract?”

Even if you have to lose a trick to the ♥K, you can count four trump tricks in hand. The ace-king of diamonds makes six. You already have one club trick and there are five more club winners in dummy, which seems to bring your total to twelve. Let's just check – can you reach those club winners after trumps are drawn? Clearly, the only possible entries to dummy are in trumps, but that is okay so long as the trumps split no worse than 3-1.

Let's play it through mentally before doing anything: win with the ♣K, cash the ♥A and (assuming both defenders follow suit) continue with a second trump. What can the defenders do?

If West holds up the ♥K, you will simply win in dummy and cash winning clubs, discarding losers. Eventually, someone can ruff in with the king, but there will still be a trump in dummy to get back to the winning clubs.

Alternatively, if a defender wins the second round of trumps with the king and his partner shows out, you can ruff the spade continuation and draw the outstanding trump with the queen, keeping the lead in dummy so that you can cash the clubs.

Whatever happens, you will have no problem amassing twelve tricks – slam made!

On the deals we have looked at so far, declarer risked being seduced into ruffing at the wrong time by the lure of cheap tricks. Judging when to take your ruffs is vital.

Another way of making easy tricks is via a successful finesse. Take a look at just the N/S cards on the next deal and decide how you would play Four Spades on the lead of the queen of clubs:

TO DRAW OR NOT TO DRAW... (TRUMPS, THAT IS)?

You might be forgiven for thinking this is an easy question to answer, and on many deals it is. But there are also a large number of situations where it's all too easy to make the wrong decision. As declarer, you (usually) have the majority of cards in the trump suit, but managing them to best effect isn't always quite so simple.

In this book, Marc Smith (a regular columnist for BRIDGE Magazine) looks at those less straightforward deals where you can't just 'draw trumps and claim'. Perhaps you need ruffs in the short hand, perhaps a crossruff is the way home, perhaps you have entry problems, or (shudder) a less than robust trump suit. Maybe you need to guard against a bad break, either in trumps or in a side suit. Or perhaps you need to play the early part of the hand with an eye to the endgame, planning a throw-in or squeeze.

All these eventualities and more are discussed, as the reader is shown step by step not only how to handle these issues in the play, but how to recognize them at the table and become a significantly better declarer as a result.



MARC SMITH is a bridge writer and expert player who has lived in Europe, North America and Asia. The author of more than 20 books, he co-wrote the bestselling *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* with Barbara Seagram. He is a two-time winner of the American Bridge Teachers' Association Book of the Year award.