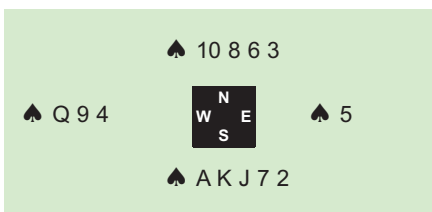


# Ruffing (Part One)



While it can be a chore having to discard, ruffing tends to be a different matter. When the opponents have chosen the trump suit, how nice it can be to make a ruffing winner or two. In general, two main factors affect whether it is a good idea to ruff: (i) whether you are ruffing a winner or a loser and (ii) whether you will score an extra trick by ruffing. The best time to ruff is usually when the declarer would win the trick with a plain card if you did not ruff and you are ruffing with a card that is not to be a winner or a guard to one.

Since identifying an opposing winner tends to be fairly straightforward, we will start by examining some trump layouts.



With a trump suit like this East's trump is otherwise worthless and East can ruff in safety. It is more likely, of course, that West will be the defender in a position to ruff something. In this case, ruffing once will not gain a trick. West needs the two low spades as guards to the queen.



Assuming that dummy is North, the layout could in fact be this. Now West

does gain a trick by ruffing. Therefore, if West gets the chance to ruff an opposing winner, it is probably right to do so.



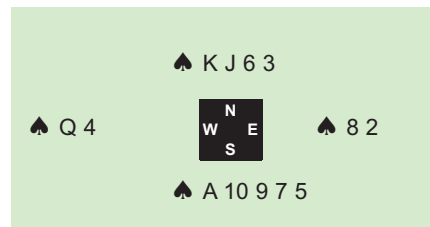
If declarer might have only four trumps, this is another possible layout. Again West may gain a trick by ruffing something – declarer might still lose two trump tricks by finessing the jack.

## Beware of an overruff

Ruffing becomes a more hazardous business when there is a danger of being overruffed. Thankfully, if declarer leads from hand, you will know for sure whether dummy is void in the suit led and has trumps higher than yours. The greater danger – and the more common one – is when the lead comes from dummy. You need to be more careful then about ruffing.



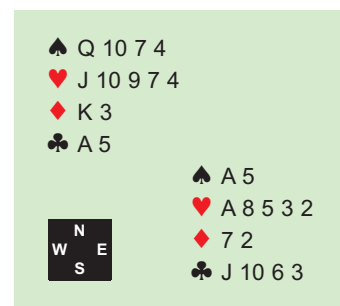
With a trump suit like this for instance, if either defender ruffs in, declarer can pick up the trumps for no loss. This means that, if it was a loser ruffed and overruffed, declarer gains a trick. If it was a winner ruffed, the defenders merely break even.



With this trump suit, again both defenders need to be wary of ruffing in a dubious cause. If nobody ruffs, declarer has to decide whether it is a case of 'eight ever, nine never' or, if not, of who to play for the queen. If, however, a defender ruffs, declarer has no possible losing guess.

## The delayed ruff

The time has come to look at examples with all the suits.



West	North	East	South
			1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
End			

Partner leads the six of hearts – clearly a singleton – and your ace wins. What do you return?

No doubt, partner has some spare trumps with which to ruff (the heart would be a poor lead otherwise; besides, you can tell that South has only four spades from the bidding). Even so, a heart return would be unwise. As well as the two aces and a ruff, you need a fourth trick to defeat the contract. If this is not the ace of diamonds or the king of spades, it will need to be in clubs. In this case, you want to lead the suit yourself because partner is unlikely to have the king of clubs as well as the queen. Your ace of trumps, you see, lets you give partner a ruff at a convenient moment rather than rushing straight away.

The full deal is shown on the next page:

*Continued on page 35* ▶

# POTTAGE ON DEFENCE continued from page 34

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

After the club switch, declarer cannot make the contract.

## When not to ruff

That was the case of a delayed ruff. Sometimes it is better not to ruff at all.

♠ J 6 5  
 ♥ K 10 7 2  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ A 7 6 5 3  
 ♠ A 2  
 ♥ J 5 3  
 ♦ 9 7 6 2  
 ♣ 10 8 4 2

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dbl <sup>1</sup>	Pass	1♦
Pass	4♥	End	3♥

<sup>1</sup> Negative

Partner leads the seven of spades, which

you win with the ace as South drops the nine. You return the two of spades and South plays the queen. Partner wins this with the king and switches to the queen of clubs. Dummy wins with the ace and leads the jack of spades. Do you ruff this?

It may have struck you as odd that partner stopped playing spades. The probable explanation is that partner started with six spades and knew that you would be overruffed on the third round. One thing is for sure: declarer must be prepared for you to ruff the third round of spades (partner bid the suit and your return of the two implied a doubleton). Can you see why it is so risky to ruff?

Look at the full deal:

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

No matter how high you ruff, declarer can overruff and then pick up the trumps without loss. By contrast, after you discard, declarer must lose a trump and a diamond.

Ruffing might also not be very clever if partner had the ace of trumps. In that case, declarer would have a two-way

finesse against the jack of hearts. Let us look at the spade position again:

♠ J 6 5  
 ♠ K 10 8 7 4 3  
 ♠ A 2  
 ♠ Q 9

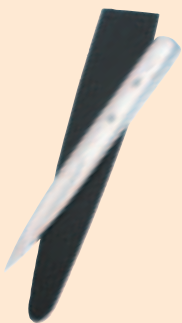
After two rounds of spades have set up dummy's jack, most of the time it would be right for partner to play a third round of spades. This would enable you to ruff dummy's jack and so prevent declarer from discarding a loser on it (because it would be necessary to overruff). You may hear this called 'killing the discard'. On this particular deal partner knew (from South's jump to 3♥) that there could be no useful discard available on the jack of spades and so switched suits. Suppose the full deal had really been this:

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

Now, after the same play to the first two tricks, West needs to play a third round of spades. Then East ruffs and declarer

*Continued on page 36* ▶

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will eventually lose a club as well as a diamond.

*Focus on discarding*

On the original version of this deal it did not matter what you discarded – you simply had to avoid wasting a trump. On other deals, your choice of discard may prove important.

♠ 8 7 5 3 2		♠ 9 4
♥ A 7		♥ J 5 4 3
♦ 8 7 3 2		♦ A 9 5
♣ A K		♣ 9 7 6 5
♠ A K J 10 6		♠ Q
♥ K 10 9 6		♥ Q 8 2
♦ Void		♦ K Q J 10 6 4
♣ 10 8 4 2		♣ Q J 3

West opens 1♠ and, after two passes, South reopens with 2♦. Thereafter the opponents climb up to 5♦.

Partner starts with two top spades. Declarer follows once, ruffs the second round and leads the king of trumps. When West shows out, you, East, win with the ace and return the five. Next declarer cashes dummy's heart and club winners. Now comes a spade. What are your plans?

South has already ruffed one spade and surely intends to ruff this one as well. Ruffing would therefore be completely pointless. Perhaps your nine of diamonds will come in handy later – using it to overruff dummy. Which suit is it that declarer plans to ruff in dummy?

The answer surely is hearts. The line of play chosen suggests that West has the king of hearts. This means that declarer intends to throw dummy's remaining heart on the queen of clubs before ruffing two hearts in dummy. To thwart this plan you discard a heart. You discard a second heart on the next round of spades. This will come after declarer throws dummy's heart on a club and ruffs a heart in dummy. This way you are able to overruff the third round of hearts to beat the contract.

When should you ruff with a card that would be a winner anyway? You ruff if you need to gain the lead quickly or to

interrupt the run of dummy's suit.

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

You lead the jack of diamonds against South's 4♠. After the ace wins, declarer comes to hand with a top trump and runs the club queen. East wins with the king and returns the diamond queen to dummy's ace. Next comes a second top trump (East following), followed by a club to the ace and the club jack, on which South throws a diamond. Should you ruff – with your trump winner?

Although you have been unable to prevent one discard, you certainly want to ruff now. Dummy has a master nine of clubs, which will provide a parking place for one of South's heart losers if you leave the lead there. This is the full deal:

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

After ruffing, you lead the diamond ten, not worrying too much if it is ruffed. Declarer will have to lead hearts from hand and will lose two tricks in the suit when

ever your partner has the queen or king.

♠ 10 9 8		♠ 6 3
♥ A K Q 9 6		♥ 10 8 7 4 3
♦ J 8 5 4		♦ Void
♣ Q		♣ K 10 8 7 6 4
♠ K Q J 7 4 2		♠ A 5
♥ J 5 2		♥ Void
♦ A Q 2		♦ K 10 9 7 6 3
♣ 2		♣ A J 9 5 3

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♥	Pass	3♦
Pass	4♦	Pass	5♦
End			

You, West, lead the king of spades. Declarer wins with the ace, cashes the club ace and leads a second club. Should you ruff?

If declarer wants to reach dummy to discard a spade on dummy's hearts. To scotch that plan you should ruff in with the queen (or even the ace) of diamonds and cash your spade winner. This is the full deal:

♠ 10 9 8		♠ 6 3
♥ A K Q 9 6		♥ 10 8 7 4 3
♦ J 8 5 4		♦ Void
♣ Q		♣ K 10 8 7 6 4
♠ K Q J 7 4 2		♠ A 5
♥ J 5 2		♥ Void
♦ A Q 2		♦ K 10 9 7 6 3
♣ 2		♣ A J 9 5 3

Give yourself a consolation mark if you worked out that a heart discard would be fractionally preferable to a spade. If declarer carelessly tried to cash three top hearts, you would be able to ruff. ■

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