

Ruffing (Part Two)



In the last issue of BRIDGE we established that ruffing tends to work well when: (i) declarer would win the trick with a plain card if you did not ruff, and (ii) you are ruffing with a card that is not going to be a winner or a guard to one. Often two players, one on each side, have run out of a suit.

This leads to some rather intriguing positions.



Suppose this is the trump suit and East leads a side suit of which both West and North (dummy) are void. In this case, South helplessly follows suit and West ruffs with the jack in the knowledge that dummy cannot overruff. The situation is just as good for the defenders if East leads a plain suit of which West and South are void. What is declarer to do? Ruffing low allows West to overruff and score the jack of spades at once. Ruffing high fares no better because now West obviously does not ruff. Having expended one of the top honours in ruffing, declarer has only two big spades left. West's jack will win the third round. Since West's jack has become *promoted*

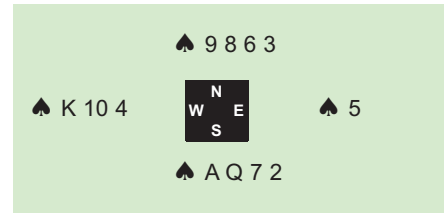
to a winner by virtue of the fact that South had to ruff first, this is known as a *trump promotion*.



I have tweaked the trump suit so that West has a sure winner (the king) without ruffing. Again, it will be beneficial to the defenders if East can lead a suit of which West is void. Suppose first that South has to follow. In this case, West, seeing the nine-high trump suit on the table, ruffs in with the ten. Since the king is still guarded, West will score the king as well. Now say that South is also void in the side suit that East is leading. Once more, West's ten should become a second defensive winner. It is easy to see this if South ruffs low: West overruffs to score the ten at once and the king will make later. The trickier situation arises if South ruffs with the queen or jack.

If, as West, you overruff with the king, you will be left with only two trumps, the ten and four. Since South still has two trumps higher than these, you will not make a second trump trick. In this situation, it is much better to discard.

That will leave the trump suit like this:



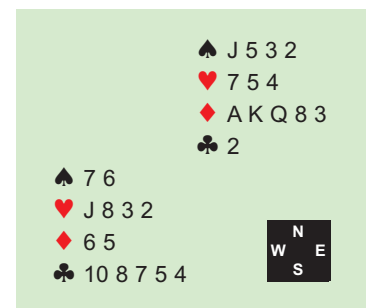
With the jack (or queen) of trumps having been played on a plain card, West's ten of spades has risen in value. It is as if West started with K-J-x over the A-Q. Barring a trump endplay (something that comes up rarely), West will make two trump tricks.



This trump layout is a close relation to the one before. East leads some other suit and South ruffs with the ten. On this occasion, West cannot be sure that refusing to overruff will gain a trick. If declarer has ruffed from an original holding of A-Q-J-10-x or A-Q-J-10-x-x, then the only trump trick due to West will be the king. There is a chance, however, that East has the jack, in which case retaining K-9-x over South's remaining A-Q-x(x) will prove worthwhile.

The full picture

The time has come to look at the full picture:



Your partner, East, opens 1♠ but the opponents sail into 4♥. You lead the seven of spades, of course, and are pleased to see partner win the first two spade tricks. Having followed to the first two rounds, declarer ruffs the third

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spade with the ten of hearts. What do you do?

Trump promotions

You will recall from the earlier examples that overruffing with a natural trump winner can be a poor move when a trump promotion is in the air. The same principle applies here. Your jack of hearts is a sure winner, is it not? The same you cannot say about your eight. Maybe South has the ace-king-queen of trumps to go with the ten, in which case probably your best hope is to find partner with the ace of clubs. On a good day, though, East will hold the (presumably singleton) queen or king of hearts. Then you can derive the benefit of discarding a diamond instead of overruffing. Look at the full deal:

<p>♠ J 5 3 2 ♥ 7 5 4 ♦ A K Q 8 3 ♣ 2</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				<p>♠ A K Q 9 4 ♥ Q ♦ J 10 9 2 ♣ Q 9 6</p>
	N										
W	S	E									
<p>♠ 7 6 ♥ J 8 3 2 ♦ 6 5 ♣ 10 8 7 5 4</p>		<p>♠ 10 8 ♥ A K 10 9 6 ♦ 7 4 ♣ A K J 3</p>									

After you throw a diamond, declarer can take the ace-king of hearts to pick up your three and two. After that, however, you will have the J-8 left over declarer's nine and thus two trump winners. It would be a different story if you mistakenly overruffed. Then declarer could use the ace, king and nine to draw your three remaining trumps.

For our next example, we move across the table:

<p>♠ Q 9 6 2 ♥ Q 7 6 4 ♦ K 7 5 3 ♣ K</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				<p>♠ A J 4 ♥ A K J 9 5 2 ♦ Void ♣ J 10 6 3</p>
	N										
W	S	E									

South, who has shown length in both minors, plays in 5♦. Partner, West, leads the eight of hearts and your jack wins. You return the ace of hearts (even if South could ruff, your hearts are strong enough to stop dummy from scoring a heart trick) and are pleased to discover that partner is the one with the singleton. How do you continue?

If you knew nothing about trump promotions, you would presumably lead the ace of spades at the third trick. After all, you know a third heart will not stand up and, unless South is void, the spade will be the setting trick.

A moment's reflection, however, should point you in the right direction. If South does have a spade, there are no winners in dummy on which it would be possible to discard it. Nor, given your club holding, is it feasible for declarer to discard four spades from dummy. So, if your ace of spades is a winner, there is no rush to take it.

By contrast, if partner has all the missing spades and a useful trump holding, it may be essential to play a third round of hearts.

Would you like to see the full deal?

<p>♠ K 10 8 7 5 3 ♥ 8 ♦ J 9 6 ♣ 8 7 5</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				<p>♠ Q 9 6 2 ♥ Q 7 6 4 ♦ K 7 5 3 ♣ K</p> <p>♠ A J 4 ♥ A K J 9 5 2 ♦ Void ♣ J 10 6 3</p> <p>♠ Void ♥ 10 3 ♦ A Q 10 8 4 2 ♣ A Q 9 4 2</p>
	N										
W	S	E									

As the cards lie, there is no way that declarer can avoid a trump loser after you lead a third heart. Most likely, your opponent ruffs high and is later disappointed to find the 3-0 break. Ruffing low (by which I mean with the ten in this context) would work no better: West overruffs with the jack.

Note that finding West with jack, nine and a third diamond was not such a huge stroke of good fortune. The third round of hearts would also promote a trump trick on any of the following trump layouts:

<p>♦ Q 9 6</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				<p>♦ K 7 5 3 ♦ Void ♦ A J 10 8 4 2</p>
	N										
W	S	E									

Without the heart lead, declarer could guess to cash the ace first and then finesse against the queen.

<p>♦ Q 8 6 2</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				<p>♦ K 7 5 3 ♦ Void ♦ A J 10 9 4</p>
	N										
W	S	E									

Again, if given the chance to play trumps unmolested, declarer could cash the ace first and then pick up West's holding by finessing.

<p>♦ J 8 6 2</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E				<p>♦ K 7 5 3 ♦ Void ♦ A Q 10 9 4</p>
	N										
W	S	E									

This time declarer would be bound to cash the ace to leave a finesse position should either defender hold four trumps.

It might even be possible to promote a winner (by playing a third heart) if South has seven trumps. In that case, West's doubleton trump would need to be Q-J or Q-10.

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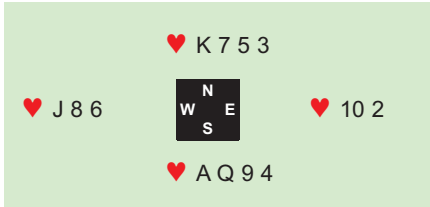
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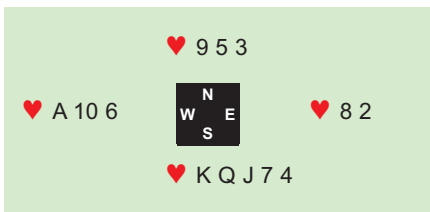
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The 'Uppercut'

A different type of trump promotion is the *uppercut*. In this case, the defender ruffs knowing that declarer (or dummy) can overruff. In most such situations, the ruff promotes a trick for the other defender.



Declarer, with the lead, could draw the defenders' trumps (hearts) in three rounds. In practice, West is on play and leads a suit of which both East and South are void. East ruffs with the ten and, after South overruffs, West suddenly has a trump winner.

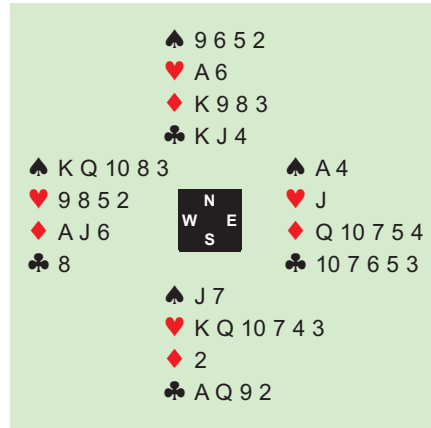


West always has one trump winner but suppose East ruffs something with the eight. To win the trick South must overruff with an honour but this gives West two trump tricks instead of one.

Obviously, in both examples, it would be a waste of time for East to ruff with the two. South would have to ruff with something higher than the two anyway. *Indeed a good general rule is that, when trying to promote a trump trick for your partner, you ruff as high as you can afford.*

Cash side winners first

There is another good general rule to consider, one that applies whether you are looking for an overruff or an uppercut. This is to cash your side winners first. Take this example:

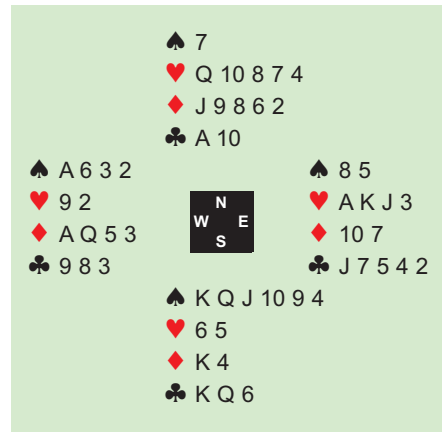


South plays in 4♥ and you, West, lead the king of spades. East overtakes with the ace and returns the suit, South following again. You have made two tricks and the ace of diamonds looks good for a third. Perhaps partner has a slow winner in one of the minors. If not, you will need to score a trump trick. The right idea, assuming East is not void in trumps, is to lead a low spade so that dummy's nine cannot be a winner. Before you put this plan into action, you must take one important step. Can you see what it is?

You need to cash the ace of diamonds first. Then, when you play the third round of spades and East ruffs with the jack, South has no choice but to overruff. If you fail to cash the ace of diamonds, declarer will refuse to overruff and discard a diamond instead. Your side will have made a trump trick but will have lost its diamond trick in the process.

Next, we will see the uppercut and the

overruff working together:



South plays in the modest contract of 2♠. Would you like to place a bet now on which card takes the setting trick?

West leads the nine of hearts and East wins with the jack. The odds are high that the nine of hearts is top of a doubleton rather than a singleton, so East correctly switches to the ten of diamonds. West makes two tricks in the suit and now has to apply the rule we mentioned earlier: before trying for a trump promotion of any description, you need to take your side winners first. A third round of diamonds would thus be premature. Instead, West reverts to hearts. East wins and plays a third round of hearts, which South ruffs high. West must abide by another of the rules: *Do not overruff with a natural trump winner.*

So West discards. A crafty declarer might lead the nine of spades next, hoping to get past the ace. West, however, is suspicious of this: if East had, for example, the queen of spades, then why does declarer not go to dummy with the ace of clubs to take the trump finesse? West therefore takes the ace of spades at once. The time is ripe now for the third round of diamonds. East ruffs with the eight and South overruffs. This leaves South and West with three trumps apiece. Since the four is one of South's spades, West's six will take the setting trick. Neither defender had to do anything particularly difficult in this sequence. They just had to play various winners at just the right time.

Special variations

Just in case you think you have seen it all, we finish with a few exceptional uppercut layouts:

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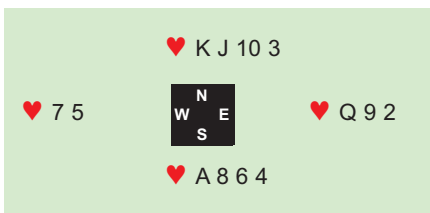
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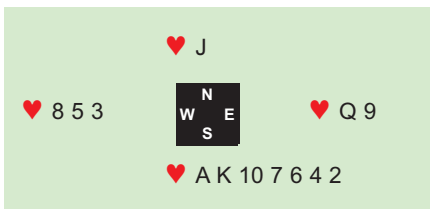
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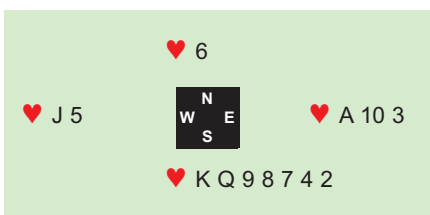
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Usually an uppercut promotes a trump trick for partner – but not in this layout. If East can ruff something with the nine of hearts, declarer cannot avoid a trump loser even if the bidding marks the position of the queen. This is therefore a rare example of promoting a trump trick for yourself.



The usual rule is to ruff high in third seat to drive out the biggest possible card from your opponent. Here that is the wrong thing to do. If East ruffs something with the queen of hearts, declarer may be able to overruff and pick up the suit without loss. A better idea is to ruff with the nine, saving the queen to cover the jack. If the nine is overruffed, it will promote West's eight to winning rank on the third round.



One other important point to remember is that an uppercut does not usually work when you have more trumps than your partner. Beware of ruffing when your own trump holding is useful and you fear an overruff. If East ruffs something with the ace of hearts, declarer suddenly has one trump loser instead of two. Ruffing with the ten is almost as bad. Then, with a winning guess (lead to the remaining honour rather than finesse the nine), declarer can again deny the defenders their second trick. ■

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