



# Adventures in Bridge, Inc.

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## (122) Declarer Play - Suits: Counting Losers

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### General

When we are declaring in a suit contract we think about the hand differently than we do when declaring in Notrump. Assuming that we have a trump fit (and not a disastrous break) then we do not have the same pressure of the opponents running a long suit on us. Since there is no danger of losing lots of tricks from a long suit (as long as we manage our trump well), we have more time to develop our winners/tricks. This allows us to think of our hand in terms of losers instead of winners. Let's see how this works.

### Counting Losers

When we count losers we generally do so from the hand with the long trump. We examine the hand with the long trump and count losers in it. We determine the losers by thinking of Partner's hand as assets (covers) for helping us get rid of our losers. The art of playing the hand (in suit contracts) is how to make use of our assets to help us get rid of our losers. (Of course, some losers we cannot get rid of, like the Ace of Trump.)

*Note: Frequently the long side will be the Declarer's hand (since he likely bid his long suit first) but there are some common exceptions to keep in mind - when we open Notrump and Partner transfers then Dummy will frequently have the long trump and we will want to count our losers from the dummy (long side).*

### Developing Tricks - Getting Rid of Losers

Although we do not have the pressure of the opponents setting up and running a long suit, timing is still an important part of the declarer play in suit contracts. Specifically, there is still a race between the Declarer and the defense. This time the race is between the opponents' trying to set up their winners (take our losers) and our trying to get rid of our losers (discard, ruff, etc...)

As the Declarer we must balance our use of the having the lead (our tempos) for drawing trump (to stop the opponents from ruffing) and setting up our tricks (to get rid of our losers before the opponents set up their winners. Similar to when we play in Notrump, if we have very little threat from the opponents (lots of tempos) then we should balance setting up our length tricks (long suits) vs. our strength tricks (finesse, etc.) In suit contracts we have even more flexibility to establish length tricks by ruffing out long suits without having to give up the lead.

*Example*

♦ AKx            ♦ xxx  
♣ KQJ           ♣ xx

The opponents lead ♦Q to start to develop their ♦ trick. We must knock out the ♣A to establish our ♣ tricks and discard our ♦ loser before the opponents can take that trick. We have enough controls to do so, so this is an example of “winning the race”.

### **Misfits -- Control**

When we are playing in a suit contract but we do not have an actual fit (fewer than 8-cards together) then we are not as in control of the hand as we are in other suit contracts. In this case, we face the danger that the opponents might be able to take control of the hand (run us out of trump) and run their long suit against us. This makes playing a misfit hand similar to playing a Notrump contract – we face the danger that there is a race to set up tricks. When we play a misfit we should count our winners, not our losers (like a Notrump contract).

*Note: If we are not planning to draw trump on a particular hand (like one with a 4-4 fit that we are going to use to cross ruff), then we need to count winners instead of losers there as well.*

### **Conclusion**

When we play in a suit contract (especially when we have a fit), we have the advantage of being in control of the hand – the opponents cannot run a long suit on us. This allows us to have a different approach to this kind of hand – counting losers, not winners. In doing so we make use of Partner’s hand to get rid of our losers (by discarding or ruffing them). The play can be very different in a suit contract, but it still maintains many of the same factors (like the race to develop tricks) that Notrump play does – so learn to think about these hands differently, take your tricks, and make a plan to get rid of your losers!