



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(204) Using Dummy's Shortness

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Level: 1

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General

When declaring a hand in a suit contract with a dummy that contains a suit in which it is shorter than declarer, declarer has a valuable asset. We need to know what our options are for how to make use of this shortness to help us dispose of our losers. Here we examine some of these options in detail.

Note: For our discussion here we assume that declarer's hand has the long trump (or equal length trump) and that dummy has the short trump. This is so we can make our plan by counting our losers from the declarer's hand. If the long trump suit is in the dummy then everything discussed here can be applied from dummy towards to declarer's hand - turning the ideas around.

Ruffing Losers

When dummy has shortness and plenty of trump, then after drawing trump we can use the shortness in dummy to get rid of or cover our "extra losers" in this suit.

Example

♠ Q8642

♥ 7

♦ A764

♣ AQ3

♠ AK753

♥ A65

♦ K3

♣ K92

With ♠ as trump, we can ruff our ♥ losers because dummy is short. We have plenty of trump, so we can afford to draw trump first.

When dummy has fewer trump (or more generally, our trump fit is smaller) then we can not afford to draw trump before using dummy's trump to ruff our losers.

Example

♠ QT4
♥ 7

♠ AKJ98
♥ A43

In this case, with ♠ as trump, we must ruff our ♥ losers before drawing trump.

In general, when we have a large trump fit (we will have trump left in dummy after trump being drawn) then it is easier and safer to ruff our losers after pulling trump. When we have a smaller trump fit it makes the play more complex because we must ruff our losers before drawing the opponents' trump - creating a danger that they may score a trick with one of these small trump.

Ruff to Establish a Suit

Note: This is often referred to "ruffing out" a side suit.

When we have a long suit opposite dummy's shortness, we may not be able to ruff all our cards in this suit. But we may not need to do so in order to have no losers in this suit. If this side suit "splits" well (for example each player having three) then we may be able to ruff some (and maybe lose some) tricks and *then* turn our other little cards into winners, not losers, by running the opponents out of this suit.

Example

♠ 98
♥ A4

♠ AKQJT
♥ K9832

Before using our ♠ to draw trump, we want to try to establish the ♥ suit. Play the ♥A, the ♥K, and then ruff a ♥. If the ♥ split 3-3, then the suit is established; if the ♥ are 4-2, we return to our hand in another suit and use dummy's last trump to ruff another ♥, establishing the suit. If the opponents find the excellent trump lead then they cut down on dummy's ruffing power. We only have one trump left in the dummy and we can ruff ♥ only once. If ♥ are 3-3, our suit will establish with no losers, but if ♥ are 4-2 after our one ruff we will still need to lose a ♥ trick in order to turn the rest of the ♥ into winners.

Ruffing Finesse

To take a finesse is to play one opponent for a specific card and use that information to try to take extra tricks. When dummy is out of cards in a side suit but still has

trump, then we can use this situation to take a special kind of finesse called a *ruffing finesse*.

Example

♠ 54

♥ --

♠ 98

♥ KQJ

In this situation if ♠ are trump and trump are already drawn, then we can lead the ♥K from our hand (one of the equal honors) and if LHO has the Ace and they cover, we ruff and are left with no ♥ losers. If LHO does not cover, we discard something else and our ♥K will win the trick. As long as LHO has the ♥A, we have no losers in this suit by taking a ruffing finesse.

Example

♠ QJT4

♥ 6

♠ AK962

♥ QJT9

In this example, assume LHO leads the ♥A (from ♥AK). This leaves a void in the dummy and declarer with a sequence of honors. Declarer also now expects LHO to have the ♥K and so declarer can draw trump and then lead the ♥Q - ruffing the ♥K if covered or letting it go (taking the ruffing finesse if LHO does not play the ♥K.)

Using Shortness and Promotion to Create More Shortness

When dummy has shortness and many trump and we have lots of honors in this short suit, we can use this suit to produce a source of tricks to discard cards off the dummy and create new shortness. Now in this new short suit we use dummy's shortness to ruff away declarer's losers in that suit.

Example

♠ QJ763

♥ Q4

♦ A75

♣ A82

♠ AK982

♥ KJT

♦ K64

♣ K4

Here we use declarer's ♥ honors, after knocking out the ♥A, to discard one of dummy's ♦. This creates new shortness in the dummy, as dummy has 2-cards in ♦ and declarer 3-cards, and this allows declarer to avoid the 3rd round ♦ loser.

Example

♠ KQ75

♥ KQ

♦ 6543

♣ A94

♠ AJT43

♥ AJT6

♦ 7

♣ 876

We can use one short suit to create another, then use the new short suit to ruff declarer's losers in that suit. Here, we use declarer's long ♥ to discard ♣ from the dummy and then ruff declarer's ♠ losers. If trump are 2-2, that will leave two trump in the dummy to ruff both of declarer's ♣ losers.

Conclusion

When the member of the partnership with the short trump (assumed to be dummy here) has a side suit this is shorter than declarer's holding in that suit, then that shortness can be used to help reduce our losers. This shortness is extremely valuable and can be used in a variety of ways depending on declarer's holding in the suit, the trump fit, and how honors fit together in this side suit. When you are declarer, make sure you do not waste this valuable asset in your dummy!