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This Week in Bridge

(246) Trump Suit Management - Removal and End-Plays

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Level: 4

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General

Expert players look for ways to avoid taking a finesse. A finesse is usually a fallback plan that is taken only when no other line of play works. One way to avoid taking a finesse is to get the opponents to lead this suit for us. Of course, most opponents are not cooperative, and do not help us in this way. But there are times when we can force the opponents to lead a suit and accomplish what we want for us. One of the ways to get them to lead a suit is to put them on lead when they have nothing but that suit remaining. But this does not happen all that often. Another way to accomplish this is to eliminate all the other suits and then put the opponents on lead, so they must lead what we want them to. Let's see how to make this work.

Suits to be Led by the Opponents

Before we take a look at the full concept of a "Strip and End-Play" let's first look at suits that we want to avoid leading ourselves, where we want to force the opponents to lead the suit instead of us.

Example 1

Axx

KJx

In this situation, we are guaranteed three tricks if LHO leads the suit.

Example 2

AJx

KTx

Here we win three tricks if either opponent leads this suit.

Example 3

Axx

Qxx

Again, it is best if the opponents lead this suit for us. If LHO leads the suit then we are guaranteed two tricks, while if we lead the suit we may get one or two tricks depending on the location of the King.

Example 4

Qxx

Jxx

Here if we lead the suit, we may win no tricks. But if either opponent leads this suit we are guaranteed a trick in this suit.

There are many more card combinations where we want to force the opponents to lead the suit for us!

Removal of Side Suits

Now that we know what kind of suits we want our opponents to lead, we need to look at how to get them to lead those suits for us. The main way that we force our opponents to do this is by removing their options of playing another suit. We eliminate the other suits both in our hand and the dummy. We usually do this by ruffing away or playing all the cards in these side suits, leaving us void in both hands.

This removal of the side suits leaves an end position where we put the opponent on lead and have only trump and the suit we want the opponents to lead in both hands. This act of “removing” the side suits is also called “*Stripping the Hand*” or “*Eliminating the suits*”. This is a key part, the removal or strip, of the *Remove (Strip) and End-Play* line of play.

The Throw-In

Another important part of the *Removal and End-Play* is to put the opponents on lead at the time we want them to be. What this requires is a trick that we plan to lose to give the desired opponent the lead. This act of giving them the lead, when we are ready to, is called a “*Throw-In Play*”. Throw-in plays are valuable in many situations as declarer. Before we throw the opponents in here, we must prepare the hand to be how we want it so that the opponents will not be able to have an easy suit to

lead back to us. What we must do is strip the hand, then we can execute our “Strip and End-Play”!

“Strip and End-Play” (Removal and End-Play)

Let’s look at how we combine stripping a hand (removing the side suits so the opponents cannot use that suit as an *exit card* to get off lead) with throwing the opponents in (putting them on lead) so that they must either lead the suit we want them to lead or give us a ruff and a sluff. Let’s look at an example of this.

Example 5

♠ QJ8754
♥ K3
♦ AT6
♣ A2

♠ AK932
♥ A65
♦ KJ7
♣ 64

In a ♠ contract on a ♣ lead, we draw trump, play the ♥K, then ♥A, and ruff South’s final small ♥, stripping the ♥ suit. We exit with our last ♣, leaving the opponents on lead in this position:

♠ QJ8
♥ --
♦ AT6
♣ --

♠ 932
♥ --
♦ KJ7
♣ --

Now our opponents must either lead a ♥ or ♣ and give us a ruff and a sluff (allowing us to get rid of our third round ♦ loser) or lead a ♦, on which we can play 2nd hand low and guarantee three tricks.

Conclusion

When we have a large number of trump in each hand and a suit that we do not want to lead ourselves then we can try to force our opponents to do so by playing for a

strip and end-play. We draw the opponents' trump (so they cannot exit in that suit) and then strip the side suits and put them on lead to solve our problem for us. Add this declarer play technique to your repertoire - it is an excellent tool for avoiding taking a finesse.