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This Week in Bridge

(438) Suit Contracts - Trump Fits

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Level: 3 of 10 (1 of 6)

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General

When we play a suit contract one of the most powerful parts of our hand is our trump fit. Fits have a way of producing tricks beyond just HCP! The larger our fit, the more trump we have, and trump have many ways of turning into tricks. Trump can be used to help set up a long suit, ruff losers, take ruffing finesses, and many other things. The concept of the *Law of Total Tricks (LOTT)* is all about the power of fit – the larger our fit, the more we should bid. Here we look at fit in more detail and see how it has special powers.

The Basic Trump Fit – 8 Cards

When we have only an 8-card fit we usually have control of the hand if this suit becomes trump (we have 3 more trump than the opponents) but this is still not considered having a large number of trump. With an 8-card fit a bad trump split or mismanaging our trump can lead to a disaster. When we have an 8-card fit and are determining how to play our hand (and specifically how to make use of our trump suit) we must consider the type of 8-card fit we have. Let's look at some examples of 8-card fits to help us understand our likely play options.

6-2 Fits – Very Long Suits

6-2 fits (or 7-1/8-0 fits) are some of the simplest 8-card trump suits to play. We will count losers from the hand with the long trump and use this long suit to draw trump. We also will not be able to ruff many of our losers in the short side – there are not many trump there to use. But because of our long trump suit we should be able to stay in control of the hand, even if the trump suit splits poorly – we will still have more trump than an opponent who has 4 cards in our suit (for example).



5-3 Fits – Long Suit

With 5-3 fits we have fewer trump in the long side of our hand than we have a 6-2 fit. This makes us more susceptible to losing control of the hand if the outstanding trump splits poorly (4-1 or 5-0). It also means that we have more potential losers (cards in the other three suits) in our hand to deal with. Remember we count losers from the long trump side so when we have a 5-card trump suit that leaves us with 8 other cards to deal with (instead of 7 when we have a 6-card trump suit). But when we have a 5-3 fit then the short side has more trump to help us ruff our losers than when we have a 6-2 fit. But since we only have an 8-card fit, if we draw trump (even if trump split well, 3-2) we will no longer have any trump remaining in partner's hand to ruff with. Thus, we must do our ruffing before drawing all the trump.

4-4 Fits – No Long Suit

If our 8-card trump fit is a 4-4 fit then we no longer have a long suit (or a long side), so we can count losers from either side and set up either hand. 4-4 fits are the most flexible hands to play, but the lack of a long trump suit in one hand makes us even more susceptible of losing control of the hand if there is a bad trump break (5-0 or 4-1). Even if there is a 3-2 trump split, our lack of a 5-card suit can make us susceptible to losing control of the hand. If trump do split well, we will have a trump remaining in both hands and be able to ruff a loser in partner's hand (the side we are not setting up). If we have more losers, we can try to ruff those in the other hand (the hand we are not setting up) before drawing trump – giving us more trump tricks. 4-4 fits also allow for other lines of play like crossruffs (where we never actually draw trump).

Better Fits - 9 Card Fits

The larger our fit, the more trump we will have left to ruff with after trump are drawn. With 6-3 or 5-4 fits we may be able to draw trump before we ruff in the short side (or partially do so). This is particularly true with a 5-4 fit: if trump split 2-2 then we will still have 2 cards for ruffing with and if trump split 3-1 we will still have 1 trump to ruff with. This 9-card fit gives us much comfort in ruffing our losers than an 8-card fit – 5-3 or 4-4.

Even Better Fits – 10 Card Fits

As our fits grow larger, we continue to be able to ruff more of our losers after we draw trump. A classic example of this is the power of a 5-5 fit if both hands have shortness. In this case, many losers can be ruffed, and our side suits can be set up. This is the kind of hand where tricks seem to magically appear out of nowhere – the true power of fit! Even without many HCP we bid a lot with a 5-5 trump fit – Responder's "Weak Freak"!



Conclusion

Fit is one of the most powerful declaring assets in bridge. “Fit is King” is the saying – and is often true. In trump contracts, fits produce tricks in many ways: ruffing losers, establishing long side suits, and making soft trump card Queens and Jacks less relevant. Understanding the power of our fit in the auction is done through the Law of Total Tricks (LOTT) and our hand re-evaluation skills. Using our fit in the play is done by our approach to the hand – counting our losers instead of winners. So, let’s make use of our fits and get the full power from our trump!