



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(392) NT Play: Transportation

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

When we are declaring a hand, especially in notrump, which of our hands has the lead often affects the line of play that we choose. Being in a hand that contains winners allows us to cash those winners. Alternatively, being in a hand that is opposite partner's high cards allows us to lead up to those cards – hoping to establish them as winners (often taking a finesse). Being able to move back and forth between our hand and the dummy is a major part of good declarer play. We call being able to get the lead from one hand to the other having *transportation*. One of the skills we need to learn to be a good declarer is to manage our transportation (also sometimes called communication) between our hand and the dummy. The card that we are planning to use as transportation to the other hand is called the *entry*. These entries are valuable assets and need to be managed carefully. Transportation management is particularly important in notrump contracts. In suit contracts, we often have more entries available by using the trump suit to move between the two hands. Let's take a look at how transportation plays a key role in finding the best line of play in notrump contracts.

Unblocking a Suit

One of the simplest examples of transportation is to play a suit in a fashion that allows us to take all the tricks by *unblocking the suit*, which is usually done by getting the honors out of the short side of the suit first.

Example 1

KQJx Ax

When playing this suit, if we cash the King, Queen, or Jack first then the "short hand" will be left with the stiff Ace and the suit will be blocked. This means that when we take the Ace on second round of the suit, we will be in the wrong hand, not being able to take the last two winners. To avoid blocking the suit, we play the Ace first and then the small card from that hand on the second round (so we win the second round in the long hand and can cash a third and fourth winner.)

General Rule for Unblocking

Get the honors out of the short side first.



Where to Win the Opening Lead

One of the most basic parts of managing our transportation is what we do at trick 1. When there is a long suit in one hand, then (particularly in a notrump contract) we will often attempt to establish this suit into winners. But turning this suit into winners does no good unless there is a way to reach that hand with an entry, and then take those tricks. Thus, it is important to try to maintain the entries to the hand that has winners for as long as possible.

One place where players commonly make a mistake related to transportation (and entries especially) is at trick 1. When we have the Ace in one hand and King in the other hand, it is important to be careful about which one we win first. We usually want to keep the winner (entry) in the hand that has the long suit that we will be trying to establish.

Example 2

♠ A7

♥ KQJ95

♦ 432

♣ 864

♠ K53

♥ T4

♦ AK76

♣ A975

On a hand like this, we plan to knock out the ♥A and establish the ♥ winners. But if we have no entry to the winners, they will not be very helpful to us. On a ♠ lead we must be careful to preserve the entry to the ♥ winners. We win the ♠K at trick 1, leaving the ♠A as an entry to the ♥ winners once we have knocked out the ♥A.

General Rule for Transportation to Winners

Keep entries to the hand with a potential source of tricks until after the winners are established.



Example 3

♠ A2
♥ AK43
♦ 8765
♣ 984

♠ K865
♥ QJ
♦ AK4
♣ A752

Here we combine unblocking a suit, getting the honors out of the short side first in ♥, with winning the opening ♠ lead in the proper hand. We win the ♠K at trick one and then cash the ♥QJ immediately, before the ♠A is dislodged. Then we have 2♠, 4♥, 2♦, and 1♣ for 9 tricks. We can also play ♦AK and another ♦ to see if the ♦ split 3-3 before we enter dummy with the final entry of the ♠A – making an overtrick if so.

Managing Entries to Take Finesses

Another time when it is important for us to be in the correct hand is when we are taking a finesse. In this case, we need to lead up to the tenace. If we have limited entries to the “opposite hand” (the hand we want to be in), then we need to manage those entries carefully if the finesse may need to be repeated.

One way we can manage our transportation is to lead an honor to remain in the proper hand to repeat the finesse if it works. This is particularly important when we have no other entries to the hand we want to be in.

Example 4

AJT9x

Qxx

In this example, if we are in the South hand and cannot return (no outside entries) then we must be sure to lead the Queen on the first round of the suit. This allows us to take the finesse and if it is successful, remain in the South hand so the finesse can be repeated. If we lead a low card up to the Jack on the first round we will be in the North hand and will not be able to repeat the finesse.



Conclusion

The most important part of managing our transportation when we are declarer is to plan at trick 1. This means thinking about all the possible winners that we are attempting to develop and then try to give ourselves a chance to reach them if they become winners. In a suit contract, the trump suit may help make transportation easier, but in notrump we must be especially careful to manage our entries to each hand properly! Stop at trick 1 and plan for how you will develop winners and then reach them.