



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(439) Suit Contracts - Ruffing Values

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Level: 3 of 10 (1 of 6)

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When playing a suit contract the trump suit is an important and complex part of our declarer play plan. Playing card combinations, in the trump suit or other suits, is a large and difficult topic. Then, when we introduce more trump suit choices into the play (stopping ruffs, getting ruffs, trump transportation, etc.) we can see that trump suit management becomes even more complicated and difficult to handle. Let's look at how we handle these pesky trump and how we use them in the best way we can – ruffing being a key part of this play.

Ruffs

In suit contracts we try to produce extra trump tricks by ruffing. Traditionally, this is done by ruffing our losers - that is, trumping losing cards from the hand we are setting up with the trump in the other hand. We are normally setting up (counting losers) from the long trump side, so we usually ruff our losers in the short side. This is important, as ruffing losers in the long side does not usually produce extra tricks. Let's look at a classic example.

Example 1

AKQJT 987

If this is our trump fit and we do no ruffing, then we will take 5 tricks in the trump suit. If we ruff in the long side, we will score our ruff and the remaining 4 trump in that side and we will still have a total of 5 tricks. However, if we ruff in the short side (987) then we still have 5 trump tricks in the long side and the ruff – for a total of 6 tricks. If we can ruff more losers in the short side, we can produce even more trump tricks. So, ruffing in the short side generally produces extra tricks while ruffing in the long side does not. In fact, ruffing in the long side exposes us to losing control of the hand if the trump break poorly.



Establishing a Side Suit

Ruffing a loser in the short side can result in more than just one extra trick.

Example 2

♠ AKQJT ♠ xxx
♣ AKxxx ♣ xx

If we can ruff the third round of this ♣ suit and the suit splits 3-3, then suddenly all of the ♣ are now winners – this is called “ruffing out a suit”.

When a long suit is in the other hand (the short trump side) then the only way to “ruff out the suit” is to ruff in the long side. (This is a more common situation than our previous example. The hand with shorter trump is much more likely to have a long side suit than the hand with long trump). This is one of the situations where we intentionally ruff in the long side. We are willing to spend our long trump to establish dummy’s side suit and produce additional winners. These additional winners can be discards for potential losers from the “long trump side”. We do this when we need to create discards, even though ruffing in the long side increases our chance of losing control of the hand.

Conclusion

Learning to use our trump effectively and efficiently is a challenging part of being a good declarer. One of the most valuable uses of our trump suit is to ruff our losers. Understanding that ruffing just any trick is not in and of itself a good thing is a major step forward. Ruffing is normally done the “short trump side” but can also be done in the long side to establish a long suit. We need to learn to manage our trump effectively – gaining tricks by getting rid of losers while balancing not losing control of the hand. Try to think in terms of your losers in the long trump side and find a way to use your trump as an asset to get rid of these losers.