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This Week in Bridge

(444) Suit Play – Discarding Losers on Dummy’s Strength

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

When dummy has a suit longer than declarer (we are assuming here that the dummy is the side with the short trump and that we are counting losers from the declarer’s hand) and we have a reasonably large fit, there is a chance of establishing the suit by getting the opponents to run out of that suit. If we have a smaller fit, then running the opponents out of the suit is not as likely, but we still have potential for turning this suit into winners for discards if we have honors in the suit. Here we look at how to develop discards in a strong suit in dummy that is longer than declarer’s, but not long enough to establish based on length.

Establishing Winners -- Power

We can establish dummy’s honors that are not winners yet in many similar ways in both suit contracts and notrump contracts. One difference is that we are generally counting losers instead of winners when playing in a suit, and generating extra winners in the dummy will not always help us. These extra winners are only useful when the discards they allow us to make produce extra tricks.

Example 1 – Promotion through Pure Power

Dummy	Declarer	
KQJT	x	Give up 1 loser to produce 3 discards.
KJT _x	Q	Give up 1 loser to produce 3 discards.
KJT _x	Q _x	Give up 1 loser to produce 2 discards.
KJT _x	Q _{xx}	Give up 1 loser to produce 1 discard.



Establishing Winners – Power and Ruffing

Just as we can ruff a suit to run the opponents out of cards in that suit and establish it into winners, we can also ruff a suit so that the opponents' honors fall and leave only winners in the dummy. This is a blend of using the suit's honors to establish into winners and ruffing a suit to establish it in the more traditional way (using only length).

Examples 2 and 3

AQxxx x
AQJxx x

In these situations, we can play the Ace and ruff, enter dummy, and continue to ruff until the King falls. If we need more discards, then we can take a finesse as well, and then try to ruff out the King.

Example 4

AQxxx xx

In this position, we usually take a finesse for no losers if it succeeds. Then we try to ruff out the suit and establish smaller cards. But, if we "know" (from the bidding) that the King is likely offside, then we will certainly have a loser. In this case, we should avoid the finesse and just duck the first round, then play the Ace and ruff the suit out. If the King falls, the suit will establish faster and produce more winners.

Establishing Winners – Ruffing Finesse

Another way to use a powerful holding in dummy that is longer than that in declarer's hand is to try to take a ruffing finesse. This can be done for an immediate winner or can be done to help establish a long suit.

Example 5

KQJT --

Here declarer can lead the King from the dummy. If RHO has the Ace, then letting this King go can result in a discard. If RHO covers, then declarer ruffs and returns to dummy to take discards.

Example 6

KQT32 --

In a more complex holding like this, declarer can lead the King from the dummy and ruff if it is covered by the Ace or take the ruffing finesse if it is not. If the King holds the trick, then we ruff the suit out to either get the Ace and/or Jack to fall and establish the suit for more discards.



Example 7

KJT9 x

Here we play up towards the honors in the dummy and try to guess what to play, and usually we play the Jack, assuming that LHO would take the Ace if they had it. If that loses to the Queen, we are not done yet. We now either try to ruff enough of the suit for the Ace to fall (presumably better if dummy had a 5-card suit) or we lead the King and take the ruffing finesse against RHO having the Ace.

Establishing Winners – Loser on Loser Play

A classic technique for making use of a series of honors in the dummy is to make a *loser on loser* play. In this case, by giving up a loser where we may not need to lose a trick, we are able to establish a series of discards that turn out to save us more tricks than we gave up.

Example 8

♠ --	♠ x
♥ KQJT	♥ --
♦ Ax	♦ xxxx
♣ --	♣ x

Here, in a ♠ contract, if trump are drawn and we are in the dummy, we can lead the ♥K from the dummy and discard a ♣ on it. Even if this loses to the ♥A, it is not a problem. All we have done is exchanged our ♣ loser for a ♥ loser. But in the process, we have established three more ♥ winners on which to discard our three losing ♦. This is a loser-on-loser play that establishes more winners for us.

Conclusion

Length in dummy can be a powerful asset. If it is a long weak suit (or a side fit), then it can possibly be established through ruffing. But if it is a strong side suit (or a relatively short one), we establish the winners through taking finesses, ruffing out the missing honor(s), or taking a ruffing finesse. How we choose to play these suits may depend on our knowledge of the hand and/or our number of entries to the dummy. When attempting to establish a suit, considering our number of trump remaining (how in control of the hand we are) as well as managing our entries can be a complex part of deciphering the situation. Take a look at how to make use of dummy's suits that are longer than yours and the details of how to handle these situations.