



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(442) Suit Play – Losers with Equal Length in Dummy

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Level: 4 of 10 (1 of 6)

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General

When declaring a suit contract, the ways in which we can produce tricks differ significantly from when declaring a notrump contract. Suit contracts are more complex in some ways because when we examine losers instead of winners, there are more options for how we can try to dispose of our potential losers. In other ways, suit contracts can be simpler than notrump contracts because of the existence of the trump suit. A trump suit can make the play easier in that we have to worry less about losing control and it can make the play more difficult because the opponents may have the ability to ruff our tricks, creating losers that we were not expecting.

As declarer, when we examine each suit for potential losers we look at dummy's holding in that suit and think about how to make use of it in combination with the cards in our hand. We can classify the different types of situations by comparing the relative lengths of the suit in dummy and in declarer's hand. There are suits that are shorter in dummy, suits that are longer in dummy, and suits that are equal in length in dummy and declarer's hand. Here we examine how to play suits that are equal in length in dummy and declarer's hand and our options for how to reduce our losers.

Promotion

We can produce winners (or reduce our losers) by making use of our combined assets in the dummy and declarer's hand.

Example 1

| | |
|----------|-------|
| Declarer | Dummy |
| Axx | KQx |

When we first look at our losers in declarer's hand we have two. But when combined with dummy's holding we have no losers in this suit.

We can also use declarer and dummy's assets together to establish winners and reduce our number of losers.



Example 2

Kxx QJx

When we first count our potential losers, we see 2-3 losers in this suit. But when we combine declarer's holding with dummy's then we can use one honor to push out the Ace and promote the other two honors into tricks, ensuring only one loser in this suit.

Finesses

When the declarer's hand and dummy have the same length, one of the classic ways to try to reduce losers is to take a finesse. This means to play for a card (usually an honor) to be in a specific hand.

Example 3

xx AQ

Example 4

xxx AQJ

Example 5

Jxx AQT

We lead up towards the honors and play for LHO to have the King. If they have it, we have no losers, instead of one loser. These are many variations of this type of play. The finesse is a valuable tool for reducing losers when we have equal length suits and no other way to get rid of these losers.

Leading Up to an Honor

Another way that we can play card combinations is a variation on a finesse. Leading up to an honor, playing for the opponent you want to hold a specific card, is a similar concept to a finesse and is a way to reduce our number of losers in a suit.

Example 6

xx Kx

If LHO has the Ace of this suit, we have only one loser by leading from the declarer's hand up towards the dummy. If RHO has the Ace, we have two losers in this suit no matter how we play it.

Example 7

Axx Qxx

We can tackle this suit in a similar fashion. If we lead from the declarer's hand up towards the dummy's Queen, then if LHO has the King we have only one loser, while if RHO has the King we have two losers.



Get the Opponents to Lead the Suit

There are some (many) holdings where it is best for the opponents to lead the suit rather than us.

Example 8

AJx KTx

In this situation, we have a two-way finesse, and may have one or no losers depending on whether we can guess the Queen. But if the opponents lead the suit for us, we can play second hand low and guarantee no losers in the suit.

Example 9

Kxx Qxx

In this situation, if we lead the suit towards the Queen and it wins, we should play back towards the King and duck. This is hoping that LHO has Ax, and their Ace takes neither of our honors. If we think that RHO has Ax then we can play the suit the other way, leading a low card from dummy towards the King and then leading back up towards the Queen and ducking – hoping RHO has Ax and their Ace does not take an honor. But an even better way to play this suit is to find a way to force the opponents to lead it. If the person with the Ace ends up being forced to lead it (or lead away from it), then we can duck the lead around and win fourth hand and now lead up towards the other honor. Our goal is to find a way to lose only one trick in this suit.

Conclusion

Dealing with losers in suits where we hold the same length in both our hand and the dummy can be difficult. We may, as part of our plan to play the entire hand, want to avoid trying to tackle a suit and instead try to get rid of the losers on other winners. But if all else fails and we are forced to play the suit then knowing these tools of promotion, finesse, leading up to honors, and/or forcing the opponents to lead the suit is invaluable for minimizing our losers.