

Should you draw trumps immediately?

Often we are told that, unless there is a good reason not to, we should draw trumps as soon as possible in order to avoid an opposition ruff.

This is reasonable advice but there are some occasions when it is best not to draw trumps immediately. These include:

1. When we need to discard some losers (on winners in other suits) before the opponents can win those tricks;
2. When we need to ruff in the short trump hand (usually dummy) in order to make the tricks we need to make our contract;
3. When we need to create a long suit by ruffing out losers in the suit first (and keeping an entry into the long suit hand);
4. When cross-ruffing is the best way to make our contract;
5. When doing a dummy reversal needing to keep an entry into the short trump hand;
6. When it's better to pull only some of the trumps to reduce the opponents' ruffing opportunities while keeping trumps in both hands to find extra tricks.

1. When we need to discard some losers (on winners in other suits) before the opponents can win those tricks

Hand 1:

In the following hand south is declarer in 4S. West leads the KD.

	♠ T532	
	♥ KQ4	
	♦ A72	
♠ A6	♣ K83	♠ 74
♥ J983		♥ T762
♦ KQJ		♦ T643
♣ 9754	♠ KQJ98	♣ A62
	♥ A5	
	♦ 985	
	♣ QJT	

South can see four losers – a spade, two diamonds and a club.

South takes the first trick in dummy with the AD. If south now plays trumps west will take the ace and play two diamonds and a club – 1 off.

So, before playing trumps south should cross to the AH, back to the KH and QH, discarding a losing diamond – contract made!

Hand 2:

	♠ T864	
	♥ 765	
	♦ KQ82	
♠ 2	♣ Q9	♠ A7
♥ KQJ3		♥ 982
♦ T65		♦ J943
♣ J8742	♠ KQJ953	♣ AT65
	♥ AT4	
	♦ A7	
	♣ K3	

Here south is in 4S and west leads the KH. Again, south has four losers (one spade, two hearts and one club) and must discard one of these before drawing trumps.

So south wins the AH and immediately plays the AD followed by the 7D to the K and QD, discarding a heart loser.

Hand 3:

	♠ KJ83	
	♥ A62	
	♦ Q82	
♠ A2	♣ QJ5	♠ 65
♥ QJT8		♥ 974
♦ A43		♦ T975
♣ T643	♠ QT974	♣ A982
	♥ K53	
	♦ KJ6	
	♣ K7	

In this hand south is in 4S and west leads the QH. Again there are four losers – one in each suit – but south can make the contract if they take the first trick in hand with the KH and immediately play the KC. Even if the opponents play hearts again declarer is safe because they can win with the AH and then play the QC and JC, discarding a losing heart from their own hand. Note it was important to take the first trick in south’s hand to keep the entry to dummy’s hand.

2. When we need to ruff in the short trump hand (usually dummy) in order to make the tricks we need to make our contract

Hand 4:

	♠ K864	
	♥ 752	
	♦ Q8	
♠ 932	♣ 9653	♠ QJT7
♥ 8		♥ J93
♦ T9652		♦ AJ4
♣ AKQT	♠ A5	♣ J82
	♥ AKQT64	
	♦ K73	
	♣ 74	

South is in 4H and it looks like there are four losers – two each in clubs and diamonds.

West leads the AC, followed by the KC and QC, with south ruffing the third club. If south pulls trumps now they will lose two diamond tricks. So south should immediately play a low diamond to the Q which will lose to east’s AD. Regardless of east’s return south will regain the lead, win a diamond trick with the KD and ruff the third diamond in dummy. Ten tricks made.

Hand 5:

	♠ 32	
	♥ 54	
	♦ AK765	
♠ QT65	♣ 8765	♠ J987
♥ 32		♥ A76
♦ J98		♦ QT2
♣ AKQJ	♠ AK4	♣ T32
	♥ KQJT98	
	♦ 43	
	♣ 94	

South is in 4H and west leads the A, K and Q of clubs, south ruffing the third trick. At first sight south can see only nine tricks – five hearts, two spades and two diamonds. It's not possible to set up dummy's diamonds for an extra trick but a tenth trick can be made by ruffing south's small spade in dummy. This needs to be done before pulling trumps otherwise south will be left with a losing spade.

Hand 6:

	♠ 53	
	♥ T43	
	♦ 643	
♠ AQT	♣ 87532	♠ KJ984
♥ 752		♥ 86
♦ J98		♦ T752
♣ KQJ9	♠ 762	♣ T6
	♥ AKQJ9	
	♦ AKQ	
	♣ A4	

South is declarer in 4H. Again south can see only nine tricks – five hearts, three diamonds and one club. The only way south can see of making another trick is to ruff a spade in dummy. So, after taking west's lead of the KC south immediately leads a small spade towards dummy. Even if the opponents then lead trumps south will win the race and establish a ruff in dummy for the tenth trick. Note that

if west had initially led a trump and played trumps after both spade leads by south the contract cannot be made.

Hand 7:

	♠ QT7	
	♥ 42	
	♦ T8743	
♠ A63	♣ A65	♠ 52
♥ AT86		♥ J953
♦ J2		♦ KQ95
♣ JT92	♠ KJ984	♣ 743
	♥ KQ7	
	♦ A6	
	♣ KQ8	

West leads the JC against 4S. South appraises the hand and counts their losers – one spade, one or two hearts depending on the location of the ace, and one diamond. South can make certain of the contract if they ruff a heart in dummy before leading trumps. So, south plays the AC from dummy and immediately plays a low heart towards the Q – sure enough, the ace is with west. Regardless of what west does now when south regains the lead they will take a heart trick in hand and ruff a third in dummy. It is now safe to draw trumps with ten tricks assured.

3. When we need to create a long suit by ruffing out losers in the suit first (and keeping an entry into the long suit hand)

Hand 8:

	♠ AK432	
	♥ A93	
	♦ Q3	
♠ 987	♣ 954	♠ QJT
♥ 4		♥ 765
♦ AK652		♦ T974
♣ QJT6	♠ 65	♣ K72
	♥ KQJT82	
	♦ J8	
	♣ A83	

South is in 4H and west wins the first two tricks with the AD and KD and follows with the QC which south takes with the AC. South has nine certain tricks but If she draws trump now she will go down, losing two more club tricks. However it is possible to set up a spade trick in dummy by ruffing the third round of spades before pulling trumps; KH, then QH and finally across to the AH before playing the winning spades. Eleven tricks!

Hand 9:

	♠ A65	
	♥ 765	
	♦ A76543	
♠ 987	♣ 2	♠ 43
♥ KQJ9		♥ T4
♦ Q9		♦ JT2
♣ KJ87	♠ KQJT2	♣ AQT943
	♥ A832	
	♦ K8	
	♣ 65	

South is in 4S and west leads the KH. South can see eight tricks – but potentially has three heart losers and two club losers. The only way to make the extra tricks required is to set up the long diamond suit in dummy. South needs to retain an entry to dummy once the diamond suit is established – this has to be the AS. So, south takes the AH, then plays the KD and AD and ruffs a third diamond (high trump needed to avoid an over-ruff). Now south draws three rounds of trumps finishing in dummy with the AS. It's now possible to discard two hearts and a club on the remaining diamonds.

4. When cross-ruffing is the best way of making the contract

Hand 10:

	♠ AQ62	
	♥ A54	
	♦ AJ754	
♠ 73	♣ 7	♠ 984
♥ QJT3		♥ K76
♦ 96		♦ KQT82
♣ KT984	♠ KJT5	♣ Q3
	♥ 982	
	♦ 3	
	♣ AJ652	

South is in 4S and west leads the QH. You can see seven tricks but the hands are perfect for a cross-ruff. Take the first trick with the AH and play the AC and AD before embarking on a cross-ruff. You could afford to play one round of trumps 2S (N) to TS (S) before cross ruffing but even if you don't you'll still make 10 tricks – losing one to an over-ruff and two heart tricks.

Hand 11:

	♠ AT52	
	♥ J98432	
	♦ 5	
♠ 9874	♣ A2	♠ 3
♥ A7		♥ KQ65
♦ T762		♦ AK94
♣ Q54	♠ KQJ6	♣ T963
	♥ T	
	♦ QJ83	
	♣ KJ87	

South is in 4S. West leads the AH followed by the 7H. If south pulls all the trumps they will probably make only six tricks. After ruffing the second trick with the 6S south should take two club tricks, lose a diamond and cross ruff the hand, making 10 tricks.

Hand 12:

	♠ KJT2	
	♥ 5	
	♦ AJ762	
♠ 9643	♣ K75	♠ 7
♥ T4		♥ KQ982
♦ KQT43		♦ 85
♣ 98	♠ AQ85	♣ QJ642
	♥ AJ763	
	♦ 9	
	♣ AT3	

South is declarer in 6S. West leads the KD and when dummy is tabled south can see four spade tricks, one heart trick, one diamond trick and two club tricks – four short! However the hands scream cross-ruff. After taking the AD it's best to take your side-suit winners to prevent them being ruffed late in the play. So cash the two top clubs and the AH before embarking on a cross-ruff which makes 12 tricks.

5. When doing a dummy reversal needing to keep an entry into the short trump hand

Hand 13:

	♠ KJ6	
	♥ AQ5	
	♦ Q742	
♠ 973	♣ Q86	♠ T4
♥ 82		♥ 9764
♦ T96		♦ AKJ83
♣ KJ543	♠ AQ852	♣ A9
	♥ KJT3	
	♦ 5	
	♣ T72	

South is in 4S and west leads the TD which east overtakes with the JD and returns a second diamond. South can see five spade tricks and four heart tricks. There is no opportunity to make a tenth trick by ruffing in dummy but if the trumps break

3:2 a dummy reverse is possible – ruffing three times in south’s hand would make an extra trick and secure the contract. Keeping entries into dummy is critical (AH, QH and KS). So south ruffs the second diamond returns to dummy with the AH, ruffs another diamond, returns to dummy with the QH, ruffs another diamond high with the QS; plays the AS and then a small spade to dummy’s KS and JS, returning to the KH and JH in hand.

Hand 14:

	♠ KQ6	
	♥ T94	
	♦ J76	
♠ J954	♣ AJ62	♠ T7
♥ 65		♥ 873
♦ AKQ		♦ 9842
♣ T983	♠ A832	♣ KQ75
	♥ AKQJ2	
	♦ T53	
	♣ 4	

South is in 4H. West wins three diamond tricks and then leads the TC. South can see five heart tricks, three spade tricks (maybe four if they break but they don’t) and one club trick. There is no opportunity to make a tenth trick by ruffing in dummy but if the trumps break 3:2 a dummy reverse is possible – ruffing three times in south’s hand would make an extra trick and secure the contract. Keeping entries into dummy is critical (KS, QS and TH). So south plays the AC on the fourth trick, ruffs a club with the JH; returns to dummy via the spades to ruff two more clubs (using the QH and KH); plays the AH and then the 2H to dummy’s 9H and TH, returning to the AS in hand.

6. When it's better to pull only some of the trumps to reduce the opponents' ruffing opportunities while keeping trumps in both hands to find extra tricks

Hand 15:

	♠ KT	
	♥ AKQ7	
	♦ K74	
♠ Q	♣ 5432	♠ AJ975
♥ 642		♥ T3
♦ QJ963		♦ T85
♣ KT76	♠ 86432	♣ J98
	♥ J985	
	♦ A2	
	♣ AQ	

North is in 2H and east leads the 5D.

North plays the AD from dummy and draws two rounds of trumps. Eight tricks are assured but by not pulling the last trump declarer can score an extra trick by ruffing a diamond and a club in one hand and two spades in the other hand, eventually losing a trick to the 6H at the end of play.

The critical thing here is that although you lose one trick to a trump at the end of the hand you make two extra tricks by cross ruffing – a gain of one trick. Shortages in both hands are required to enable this to happen.

Hand 16:

Dlr: East	♠ J9	
	♥ Q42	
Vul: EW	♦ T965	
♠ KQ5	♣ AQ63	♠ AT32
♥ AJ95		♥ KT83
♦ AQ42		♦ Void
♣ 87	♠ 8764	♣ T9542
	♥ 76	
	♦ KJ873	
	♣ K J	

East is in 4H and 7S is led.

Declarer can see three (possibly four) tricks in hearts, three (possibly four) tricks in spades and one trick in diamonds; and two certain losers in clubs. If declarer decides to pull all the trumps they may make only nine tricks – two hearts if they don't pick up the QH, four spades, one diamond and two ruffs (a diamond and a club). A safer play is to pull two rounds of trumps (with the ace and king) and play spades until north trumps with the QH. Declarer then only loses two clubs and the QH ruff for ten tricks.

Hand 17:

Dlr: South	♠ AJ85	
	♥ J953	
Vul: All	♦ 984	
♠ T32	♣ 63	♠ KQ7
♥ A864		♥ KQ72
♦ 6		♦ AKQT
♣ KT984	♠ 964	♣ 52
	♥ T	
	♦ J7532	
	♣ AQJ7	

West is in 4H and 9D is led.

Declarer can see three tricks (possibly four) in hearts, three tricks in diamonds and one trick in spades; possibly two losers in clubs, one or two losers in spades and possibly one loser in hearts. It turns out that the two black aces are onside but declarer doesn't know that. So I think the safest play is to pull two rounds of trumps; play the A, K and Q of diamonds discarding two spades; then play a spade to set up a spade trick. Even if north takes the AS and leads a trump the contract is assured.

PG series (2)