



The Endplay



1. As declarer, you may use an endplay to throw one opponent on lead at a time when he has only losing options. He has no safe exit cards, and whatever he plays must present you with a trick.
2. The endplay is also known as an elimination play, a throw-in play, or a strip-and-endplay. As the name implies, it often occurs near the end of the play.
3. The endplay should be considered when you have a suit combination that is apt to produce more winning tricks if it is led by an opponent.
4. The two-way finesse: For example, with the following holding, it's best to avoid leading the suit if at all possible. See if you can get an opponent to do it for you:

North
A J 6

South
K 10 4

You could try to guess where the missing queen is, but wouldn't you rather have the opponents take the guesswork out of it for you?

5. **Split honors:** There are other card combinations where you would much rather have the opponents play the suit first:

North
Q 8 4 2

South
J 9 5 3

If the opponents play the suit first, you can't help but win one trick. If you have to play the suit yourself, you might not win any tricks.

Another example would be a combination like this:

North
K 4 3

South
J 7 5

6. The necessary conditions for an endplay to operate are:
- a. An adequate trump suit that allows you to draw trumps and still have at least one trump left in both dummy and declarer's hand.
 - b. A side suit that you don't want to touch with a ten foot pole.
 - c. A second side suit that can be stripped or eliminated from both hands either by cashing it out or by trumping.
 - d. An equally divided side suit in which you have an inevitable loser. This will be used as your throw-in suit.
7. In order for an endplay to work, you must first remove all the safe exit cards from one or both opponents' hands. This is called "stripping the hand." Then the opponent must lead a suit that will benefit you.

8. Let's look at a full deal. The contract is 4 Spades and the Club King is led. Can you identify the four necessary conditions?:

North

♠ K Q 10 5
♥ A 8 5
♦ J 7 2
♣ A 9 4

South

♠ A J 9 8 4 3
♥ K 6 3
♦ Q 8 3
♣ 5

You have plenty of trumps. You fear touching the diamond suit. The club suit can be easily stripped by playing the ace, then ruffing the second and third ones. You have an inevitable loser in hearts, so you can use hearts as your throw-in suit.

Your plan should be: "I will win the opening lead, draw trumps, eliminate clubs, then play ace of hearts, king of hearts and another heart, putting an opponent on lead. They will have to make the first play in diamonds, guaranteeing me a trick there, or they will have to give me a ruff-and-sluff."

9. You may want to endplay one opponent rather than the other. For instance, if your left-hand opponent leads the king of a side suit, maybe from KQJ(x), and you later want to put him on lead, arrange to have one card left in the suit at the point you give up the lead:

North

8 4 2

South

A 5 3

If your LHO leads the king, wait until the second round to win the ace. Later you can play a third round and hope LHO must win

10. In the following example, the contract is 4 Spades and the Diamond King is led. Can you pull off an endplay?:

North

♠ 10 9 7 3 2
♥ Q 8 4
♦ A 3
♣ J 6 5

South

♠ A K Q 6 5
♥ A K J
♦ 9 2
♣ Q 4 3

You have one inevitable diamond loser and will be set if you lose three club tricks. The suit combination in clubs is one of those in which you will do much better if the opponents lead the suit.

Play: Win the opening lead with the Diamond Ace, draw trumps, play three rounds of hearts. Then play a diamond from each hand. You have stripped the hands and one opponent will have to win this trick and then face losing options. He can lead the club suit for you, or he must give you a ruff-and-sluff.

Endplay

1

♠ AQ96
♥ A87
♦ Q542
♣ A9

♠ 7
♥ 10653
♦ A93
♣ 108753

♠ 1084
♥ KQJ2
♦ K108
♣ 642

♠ KJ532
♥ 94
♦ J76
♣ KQJ

Dealer: North
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 NT	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 NT
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Opening Lead: ♥ K

The opening lead is the king of hearts. You do your loser analysis: There is an unavoidable loser in hearts and no losers in the black suits. So your objective is to limit your diamond losers to two. How will you do this? By making the opponents break the suit for you. How do you achieve this? With an end play.

Win the lead, draw trumps, then play three rounds of clubs, discarding a heart. At this point, you have stripped the two hands of spades and clubs. Now exit with your losing heart, stripping that suit also. The opponent who wins this trick must either break the diamond suit or present you with a ruff-and-sluff.

2

♠ A92
♥ Q102
♦ 43
♣ 106543

♠ K43
♥ K854
♦ AJ76
♣ 87

♠ J75
♥ A763
♦ KQ98
♣ AK

♠ Q1086
♥ J9
♦ 1052
♣ QJ92

Dealer: East
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1 NT	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♣ Q

A Stayman auction uncovers the 4-4 heart fit and you arrive in 4 Hearts swiftly. Do you have the elements for an endplay? Yes, you have enough trumps to retain one in each hand. The spade suit is a "hands off" suit. Avoid it like the plague. Both clubs and diamonds have no losers. You'll use the heart suit for the throw-in. Win the opening lead, then cash the ace and king of trumps. Good news; the missing cards divide 3-2. Now cash both clubs, then cash three rounds of diamonds. If an opponent ruffs with the high trump, she's endplayed. If she doesn't ruff, just play a trump and put her on lead. She has to give a ruff-and-sluff or break the spade suit for you. You'll lose only two rounds of spades as long as you play second hand low.

3

♠ J92
♥ A763
♦ A2
♣ A976

♠ A73
♥ 52
♦ J8754
♣ 432

♠ K10854
♥ K8
♦ 1063
♣ Q85

♠ Q6
♥ QJ1094
♦ KQ9
♣ KJ10

Dealer: South
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Pass	2 NT	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♦ 5

Can you avoid guessing the location of the queen of clubs?

Win the opening diamond lead with your queen. Play the trump queen, losing to the king. The opponent will play another diamond. Play a second trump to your hand so that you can then cash the remaining high diamond. Be sure to discard a spade from dummy. By doing so, you've created an evenly distributed suit for the throw-in. Now you simply exit with a spade. The opponents are welcome to take their two spade tricks, but then, whichever opponent is on lead will only have losing options. Either she offers a ruff-sluff or she leads a club, giving you the answer to locating the queen of clubs.

(Source: Goren column)

4

♠ 102
♥ Q102
♦ J72
♣ KQJ93

♠ AK874
♥ A753
♦ Q104
♣ 7

♠ Q953
♥ 864
♦ K986
♣ A5

♠ J6
♥ KJ9
♦ A53
♣ 108642

Dealer: West
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♣ K

East has enough strength to offer a limit raise in spades, 10 points. Add one dummy point for the doubleton club.

The opening lead is the king of clubs. Do your loser analysis. There are two unavoidable losers in hearts. No problems in spades or clubs. So the key is to hold the diamond losers to one. Use the "strip and endplay" technique. Win the lead, draw trumps, and ruff a club. Now give up a heart trick. Let's say they return a heart. Win the ace and play a third heart. The suit splits 3-3. Whichever defender wins must break the diamond suit or give you a ruff-and-sluff.