

**Intermediate Bridge Lesson**  
**Palo Alto Bridge Club, September 13, 2016**

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When Is It Right to Postpone Drawing Trumps?

A key issue you will face each time you are the declarer in a trump contract is whether to pull trumps immediately or to take care of some other business first. As a general rule, unless you have a firm reason not to pull trumps, you will want to draw the opponents' trumps as soon as you can. This is true no matter how ragged your trump holdings may be. The declarer and dummy are likely to have more trumps than the opponents (unless you ended up in the wrong strain) and by pulling trumps you will prevent the defenders from ruffing your side suit winners.<sup>1</sup>

However, there are a number of situations where it is advantageous to delay leading out your trumps. These include: (1) ruffing losers (usually in the short trump hand);<sup>2</sup> (2) getting a fast discard of a loser before the opponents can cash their winner; (3) using trumps as entries for communication to or from the dummy; (4) setting up a side suit; or (5) playing winners before cross-ruffing the hand. Let's look at these five situations.

- 1) Ruffing Losers – You are in 6 Spades and the lead is the King of Clubs:

Q106  
3  
J74  
QJ6532

Contract: 6 Spades  
Lead: Club King

KJ98742  
A84  
AKQ  
Void

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<sup>1</sup> When there is only one trump remaining in the defenders' hands and it is higher than all of your remaining trumps (called the "master trump" or the "boss trump"), you generally do not pull it. The defender's high trump will win a trick anyway and you should not spend your trumps to draw it. Rather, the defender will eventually win a trick by ruffing in. There is an exception, however. When you have set up a suit in the dummy and have only one entry, you should force the defender to take the boss trump while you still have the entry, so you can enjoy dummy's running suit.

<sup>2</sup> A common error of less experienced players is to ruff losers on the side with the long trumps. Most often, this will not gain a trick since the long trumps would be winners later on in the hand anyway. There are some exceptions (such as playing a dummy reversal), but they are rare. Rather, it is more likely that taking ruffs on the long side will gain nothing and can cause you to lose control of the hand.

Your first responsibility as declarer in a suit contract is to count your losers (before playing to the first trick). Here, there are three losers, one in spades and two in hearts. You can afford to lose only one trick.

You need to ruff two hearts before you draw trumps, using your high diamonds or club ruffs as entries. You do not have trump control. If you play even one round of trumps, a defender will win the SA and continue with another trump to cut down on your ruffs. You will only be able to ruff one spade and will end up going down, losing a spade and a heart.

2) Getting a fast discard – The contract is again 6 Spades and the lead is the King of Hearts:

J107	
84	Contract: 6 Spades
K93	Lead: Heart King
A9752	
KQ98653	
A4	
AQJ7	
Void	

The lead of a heart was unfortunate since it immediately exposes a heart loser and you must lose a trump trick. Although again you do not have trump control, you have an easy solution. Cross to the DK and immediately play the CA, pitching declarer's losing heart. Only after discarding your heart loser should you play on trumps. If you draw trumps before playing the CA, you will lose the trump ace and a heart.

3) Using trumps as entries for a line of communication – On this hand you are in 5 Diamonds and the opponents lead the A-K of hearts, followed by the Queen of Clubs:

	852	
	J9	Contract: 5 Diamonds
	KQ9	Lead: Heart Ace
	97532	
97		K643
AK765		Q1083
764		83
QJ10		864
	AQJ10	
	42	
	AJ1052	
	AK	

You have already lost two heart tricks and have a spade loser. To make the hand, you need to find the SK on side. You cannot pull trumps since you need all three of dummy's trumps for entries in case RHO has four spades. Cross to the D9 and finesse in spades; cross to the DQ and finesse again; cross to the

DK, which pulls the defenders' last trump, and finesse a third time. Since the SK is on side, you make Five Diamonds.

- 4) Setting up a side suit. This time you are playing 6 Clubs and the opening lead is the Queen of Hearts:

KQJ	
843	Contract: 6 Clubs
9542	Lead: Heart Queen
Q87	

75  
AK6  
AK  
AKJ1063

You have hearts double stopped and have trump control so you can lead two rounds of trumps with the A and K of clubs. You need the Queen of Clubs as an entry. If clubs are 3-1 and you play a third club to pull the last trump, you will go down if an opponent ducks one round of spades and wins the second spade since this kills the dummy. Rather, abandon trumps for the time being and keep your trump entry. Now play on spades to set up that suit. After the defenders take their SA, play a club to the Queen. This pulls the last trump while getting you to the dummy so you can play your long spade winner to discard a heart from hand. This technique is called "drawing trumps ending in the dummy."

- 5) Playing a cross-ruff. East opens Two Diamonds. After an auction in which South shows hearts and North shows a diamond control, you end up in Six Clubs. The lead is the 3 of Clubs:

	AQ5	
	3	Contract: 6 Clubs
	AJ853	Lead: Club 3
	KQ105	
6432		1098
KQ1064		J9
4		KQ10762
643		72
	KJ7	
	A8752	
	9	
	AJ98	

Declarer has only five winners outside of the trump suit, three spades and two red aces. However, declarer can make seven trump tricks on a cross-ruff, for a total of 12. Declarer should cash the three spades and two aces, then cross-ruff the rest, conceding a trick at the end. NOTE: It is important to cash all the side suit winners before starting on a cross-ruff to prevent a defender from discarding and eventually trumping one of your winners. Here, if you don't cash your three spades first, LHO will pitch

spades when you are ruffing diamonds, and can ruff a spade and then lead a second trump. You will be limited to six trump tricks and fall a trick short.

**1**

♠ AK4  
♥ KJ853  
♦ 65  
♣ K86

♠ 985  
♥ 96  
♦ 108432  
♣ A43

♠ QJ106  
♥ Q104  
♦ A7  
♣ 9752

♠ 732  
♥ A72  
♦ KQJ9  
♣ QJ10

Dealer: North  
Neither Vulnerable

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

Opening Lead: ♠ Q

**2**

♠ 952  
♥ Q54  
♦ AK987  
♣ 72

♠ 83  
♥ 763  
♦ J10654  
♣ AK4

♠ AKQJ106  
♥ AJ10  
♦ Q  
♣ 965

♠ 74  
♥ K982  
♦ 32  
♣ QJ1083

Dealer: East  
N-S Vulnerable

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

Opening Lead: ♣ Q

**3**

♠ A2  
♥ AK842  
♦ Q54  
♣ KJ5

♠ 853  
♥ J5  
♦ J1092  
♣ 10983

♠ 76  
♥ Q1097  
♦ K87  
♣ Q762

♠ KQJ1094  
♥ 63  
♦ A63  
♣ A4

Dealer: South  
E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♣
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	4 NT
Pass	5 ♥	Pass	6 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♦ J

**4**

♠ 862  
♥ QJ8  
♦ K9  
♣ J10953

♠ J10  
♥ 9764  
♦ AQ42  
♣ AKQ

♠ AKQ4  
♥ 10532  
♦ 3  
♣ 7642

♠ 9753  
♥ AK  
♦ J108765  
♣ 8

Dealer: West  
Both Vulnerable

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

Opening Lead: ♣ J

**5**

♠ A8  
♥ A853  
♦ J65  
♣ AQ86

♠ 97632  
♥ J6  
♦ A974  
♣ 75

♠ QJ104  
♥ Q102  
♦ K103  
♣ 942

♠ K5  
♥ K974  
♦ Q82  
♣ KJ103

Dealer: North  
N-S Vulnerable

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

Opening Lead: ♠ Q

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### When Is It Right to Postpone Drawing Trumps – Hand Analysis

1. Dealer opens 1H and partner with an opening hand and three hearts bids 2D. Opener rebids 2NT and partner bids 4H. LHO leads the SQ from QJ10x and declarer sees four losers, one in each suit. Before drawing trumps, declarer should play on diamonds to set up a spade discard. If declarer plays on trumps before setting up the pitch, defenders will have the tempo. If declarer then finesses in trumps, LHO will win the HQ and set up a spade trick while still holding the DA as an entry, for down one. Setting up the diamond winner for a discard eliminates the fourth loser.
2. Dealer has a 17 count with long, strong spades, and opens 1S. When responder bids 1NT, opener jumps to 3S. Responder has an eight count and a known eight card fit, so bids 4S. The lead is the CQ and declarer should take stock. There are two losers in hearts, and one each in diamonds and clubs. Declarer has a double finesse position in hearts, and the odds are 75 percent that declarer can hold his losers to one in the suit. Declarer needs to find one or both heart honors with RHO. The problem is with entries. Declarer has only two entries to the dummy and the lead has already used one up. Declarer wins the Club King and must immediately finesse in hearts to make use of the Trick 1 club entry. Declarer loses the first heart finesse to the HK and LHO returns another club to the Ace. Declarer must immediately finesse a second time in hearts since the Club Ace is his last entry to the board. When the heart honors are split, declarer wins the Heart Ten and now pulls trump. Declarer loses one trick in each suit except spades.
3. Dealer has a 14 count with very strong spades. Responder bids 2/1 game force. When opener rebids spades, responder who has a 17 count bids 3S, which is stronger than 4S. Opener shows a control with 4C and responder bids 4H, showing the HA. Opener has only six losers and bids 4NT. Responder shows two key cards with 5H. Opener bids the spade slam. The lead is the DJ. Declarer tries the Queen, which is covered by the King, and declarer wins the Ace. This exposes two losers in diamonds. Declarer could try the club finesse for a diamond pitch (50 percent), but there is a better line of play if hearts are no worse than 4-2 (84 percent). To set up hearts, declarer will need three entries, two to set up the suit and one more to cash the winner, so declarer can only play one trump before playing on hearts. Declarer wins the lead and plays the SK, then crosses to the HA and HK, and ruffs a heart high. The SA is a second entry to the dummy, and declarer ruffs hearts high again. Declarer pulls trumps, then crosses to the CK to play the fifth heart, pitching a diamond. Declarer loses only one diamond. As it turns out, the club finesse is off so the 50 percent line leads to defeat.
4. Dealer has a 16 count and opens 1NT. Responder has a nine count, 4-4 in the majors, and a singleton. Responder bids Stayman and opener shows a 4-card heart suit. Responder bids 4H. There are no losers in clubs and none in spades. There are two extra winners in spades with which to discard diamonds. Declarer should draw trumps at every opportunity so defenders cannot ruff a winner. Since spades are 3-2, declarer loses three trump tricks. He will ruff one diamond in the dummy to make four. Declarer should not take the "practice finesse" in diamonds, but discard two diamonds on spades and ruff the Queen in dummy.
5. Dealer opens 1NT and responder bids Stayman, looking for a 4-4 fit in hearts. When opener shows 4 hearts, responder bids 4H. Opener and responder have mirror distribution, which lends itself to an end play. Declarer should pull two rounds of trumps, leaving the boss trump out, play two rounds of spades (spades before clubs so there is no exit card), then play on clubs. If a defender ruffs a club, she will be endplayed and either have to break diamonds or give declarer a ruff and sluff in spades. If the defender with the long trump does not ruff in, declarer throws her in with the top trump and the defender is endplayed as above.