



## Defensive Ruffing



### 1. Giving Partner a Ruff:

When you hold the ace-king combination, it's very easy to see if partner wants a ruff in the suit. You lead the ace and see if partner encourages or discourages a continuation. In the following example, the contract is 2 Spades, you are West and you begin with the heart ace. Partner plays an encouraging ten:

	<u>North</u>	
	♠ 9 7 5 4	
	♥ J 7 4	
	♦ A K 10	<u>East</u>
<u>West (You)</u>	♣ 9 6 4	♠ J 8
♠ 6 3		♥ 10 6
♥ A K 8 3	<u>South</u>	♦ Q 8 7 3 2
♦ 9 6 4	♠ A K Q 10 2	♣ Q J 3 2
♣ A 10 8 5	♥ Q 9 5 2	
	♦ J 5	
	♣ K 7	

At this point, you don't know why partner is giving you an encouraging signal. He may want a ruff or he may hold the heart queen, an "equal honor." In either case, you can continue with the heart king and another heart. As you can see, partner will ruff the third round.

**Suit Preference Signal:** Does it matter which heart you play at trick three? I suppose you could play any heart and let partner work out what to do. But why not agree to let the heart you play serve as a suit-

preference signal? You would prefer that partner return a club, the lower-ranking of the two non-trump suits. So you choose your lower heart, that is, the three. Partner will return the queen of clubs, trapping declarer's king. When you eventually win the ace of clubs, you will play a fourth round of hearts. You hope that, even if dummy ruffs this card, your partner can overruff it.

2. **Leading an Unsupported Ace:** When you have extreme length in a suit, say six or more cards, partner may well be short in the suit. Example:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	K Q 8	
<u>You</u>	A J 9 6 5 4	<u>Partner</u>
		10
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	7 3 2	

Normally it's a bad strategy to lead an unsupported ace, that is, an ace without the king to support it, against a suit contract. This is the "ace from space" play. Usually you're only helping the defense by promoting their king and queen, as in this example.

But you have the advantage of having extreme length in the suit. The chances that this suit will go around for two rounds without someone trumping are quite low. So go ahead and lead the ace. In this example, it's your partner who will be trumping the second round of the suit.

3. **When both opponents have bid a side suit, and you also have length in that suit, guess who holds shortness in that suit. Right, it's your partner. So lead that suit, hoping partner can ruff the first or second round.**
4. **Getting a Ruff:**
  - **When you hold a singleton, lead it. If you don't lead it, partner will have a very hard time working out that you have a singleton in that suit.**
  - **Plan ahead. When partner leads an apparent singleton and you have a singleton of your own, try to create your own void first before giving partner his ruff. This way you may be able to get a beautiful cross-ruff going.**

## 5. Trump Promotion:

Sometimes you suspect that partner and declarer can both trump the next trick. It may be good strategy to go ahead and play this trick. If you force declarer to ruff with a high trump, this may have the effect of promoting a trump trick for your side.

In the following example partner leads the nine of hearts against a contract of 4 Spades. How will you defend?

	<u>North</u>	
	♠ A K	
	♥ Q 10 7 2	
	♦ Q 9 6	
	♣ A K J 2	
<u>West</u>		<u>East (You)</u>
♠ J 3 2		♠ 7 4
♥ 9 6		♥ A K J 3
♦ K 5 2	<u>South</u>	♦ J 10 8 4
♣ 10 8 7 4 3	♠ Q 10 9 8 6 5	♣ 9 6 5
	♥ 8 5 4	
	♦ A 7 5	
	♣ Q	

(Source: Wm. Root)

Declarer plays the ten from dummy and you win with the jack. You now cash the ace and king of hearts. On the third round of hearts partner discards the two of diamonds, discouraging a shift to diamonds. How should you continue? Your best hope is for a defensive trump trick, so lead a fourth round of hearts. If declarer trumps with a low card, partner will be happy to overruff. And if declarer trumps with the queen, your partner's jack will be promoted to the setting trick.

## 6. The "Forcing Game":

When you hold length in the trump suit, your best strategy is to lead the suit in which you and partner hold the most cards. The idea is to force declarer to trump and shorten his trump holding. Eventually, you expect to gain trump control. This is known as the "forcing game."

If you also have the ace in the trump suit, it is best to hold up winning the ace until the round that will exhaust dummy of trumps.

## 7. When Not to Ruff:

When you have an opportunity to trump a trick, is it always right to do so? No, in fact, there are times when it is right not to trump. Look at the following example: The contract is 6 Spades; partner leads the queen of diamonds and dummy's four is played. As East, should you ruff or not?

Contract: 6 ♠

Lead: ♦ Q

West

♠ 6 5

♥ 7 4

♦ Q J 10 9 6 3

♣ J 9 8

North

♠ 9 8 7

♥ K 10 9

♦ A 7 4

♣ A Q 5 3

South

♠ A K Q J 10

♥ A Q J

♦ K 8 5 2

♣ 4

East (You)

♠ 4 3 2

♥ 8 6 5 3 2

♦ --

♣ K 10 7 6 2

(Source: Wm. Root)

Do not ruff. You will just be ruffing one of declarer's losers. Worse than that, it will allow declarer to make his contract. It's better to just discard. Declarer will eventually have two natural losers in diamonds. In general, don't ruff a low card in front of declarer. Don't waste a trump "on air."

#### 8. When Not to Overruff:

When you have a chance to overruff, should you always do so? Not necessarily. In this layout, suppose your partner is playing a suit that both declarer and you are out of. Declarer chooses to trump in with the ten. Should you overruff?

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	trump: 2	
<u>You</u>		<u>Partner</u>
trump: J 8 4 3		trump: Q
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	trump: A K 10 9 7 6 5	

Surprisingly, the correct play is to refuse to overuff. If you overuff, declarer will later be able to draw all three of your remaining trumps. On the other hand, if you refuse to overuff, you will later take two trump tricks instead of one with your jack-eight combination.

How can you recognize this situation? Usually, you will have three or four trumps that include an honor and an intermediate card such as the ten, nine or eight.