

Managing Trump as Declarer

Why pull trump?

To prevent the defenders from scoring their trump tricks.

(a) AKQ62	(b) AK762	(c) JT974	(d) A8632
J943	T953	863	9754

In (a), it is easy to pull trump.

In (b), if trumps break 3-1, it's usually advisable *not to pull the 3rd round of trumps*. When the opponents only have 1 high trump, they'll always win a trick with it, and you don't want to waste your trumps.

In (c), playing on trumps, you know you are going to lose 3 tricks. However, pulling trump is still important—you are always going to lose those 3 tricks, and you really don't want to lose 5 trump tricks if they score all their trumps independently.

In (d), often it is right to *duck* the first round of trump to maintain control. You will always lose a round of trump, and often it's right to win the 2nd round.

When do you not want to pull trump?

When you have something else that needs to happen first.

#1: *You need to get rid of a loser first.*

4♠S, ♥K lead	♠KQJ83 ♥964 ♦A9 ♣832	4♠S, ♥Q lead	♠KQJ83 ♥964 ♦K9 ♣832
	♠T74 ♥A87 ♦KQ8 ♣KQT4		♠T74 ♥AK7 ♦QJ8 ♣KQT4

Play on diamonds before pulling trump! You can't afford to lose the lead when the defense has a heart trick set up.

#2: *You need to trump a loser first.*

4♠S, ♠3 lead	♠AT7 ♥74 ♦J42 ♣J8764	4♠S, ♥Q lead	♠KJ74 ♥74 ♦842 ♣J876
	♠KQ962 ♥AK9 ♦KQ3 ♣93		♠AQ962 ♥AK93 ♦KQ ♣93

Ruff your heart losers before pulling all of the trump! Make sure not to fall into the trap of “the myth of the infinite trump.”

#3: *You want to leave a trump out after pulling trump.*

4♠S, ♥Q lead	♠864 ♥A732 ♦JT ♣Q983
	♠AK932 ♥K54 ♦KQ83 ♣4

Your goal on this hand is to get rid of a heart loser. You can pitch two hearts from dummy on the 3rd and 4th rounds of diamonds. Then you can ruff the 3rd round of hearts in dummy. However, you can only cash 4 rounds of diamonds after trumps are pulled, so it's important to pull trump and still have a trump left in dummy. You must play on diamonds *before* pulling trump. Then you can pull two rounds of trump and leave the high trump outstanding. The opponent can ruff in, but they can't pull the last trump from dummy, so you can ruff your heart.

#4: *You need trump in the short hand to maintain control.*

4♠S, ♣A lead

♠J8
♥KQJT
♦AK743
♣Q8

♠AKQT73
♥8
♦98
♣9732

The defense cashes the ♣A and ♣K and plays a trump.

If you pull trump before knocking out the A of hearts, the defense can cash clubs when they get in. The way to prevent this is by playing on hearts *before* pulling trump. Now, the defense can't hurt you because if they play a club, you can ruff in dummy. You don't plan on ruffing clubs in dummy yourself, but keeping trumps in dummy keeps control of the club suit when the defenders get in.

In general: Work on your side suits before pulling trump.

It's relatively rare that pulling trump is the first thing you want to do. Don't be overly scared of the opponents trumping.

When to pull trump:

Listen to the auction and the defense. If you're worried about the opponents ruffing, prioritize pulling trump.

Otherwise, pull trump only when you're sure you can afford to do so.

Example Hands:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">11</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto; text-align: center;">D</div>	N undefined ♠ AQ8 ♥ J92 ♦ A53 ♣ 9854	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th>W</th> <th>N</th> <th>E</th> <th>S</th> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>1NT</td> <td>P</td> <td>1♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>3♥</td> <td>P</td> <td>2♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>4♥</td> </tr> </table>	W	N	E	S	P	1NT	P	1♥	P	3♥	P	2♣	P	P	P	4♥	
	W	N	E	S															
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W undefined ♠ K962 ♥ 86 ♦ K1062 ♣ J32	E undefined ♠ J10543 ♥ A53 ♦ Q74 ♣ Q10																		
S undefined ♠ 7 ♥ KQ1074 ♦ J98 ♣ AK76																			

♦2 lead

The only way to make this hand is if you find some way of getting rid of a diamond loser. You must take the spade finesse and pitch a diamond on the 2nd round of spades when it wins *before* pulling trumps.

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W undefined ♠ Q92 ♥ A87 ♦ QJ104 ♣ A82	E undefined ♠ 103 ♥ 9542 ♦ 72 ♣ K10975																		
S undefined ♠ AK764 ♥ QJ103 ♦ A95 ♣ J	4♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0																		

♦Q lead

You must knock out the A of hearts before drawing trump. Then pull two rounds of trumps, leaving the 3rd round outstanding. Now, pitch two diamonds from dummy on hearts and ruff the 3rd round of diamonds in dummy. The defense can ruff in, but that doesn't hurt you.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> 11 D </div>	N undefined ♠ Q52 ♥ K83 ♦ J764 ♣ K94	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th style="width: 10%;">W</th> <th style="width: 10%;">N</th> <th style="width: 10%;">E</th> <th style="width: 10%;">S</th> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>2♠</td> <td>P</td> <td>1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>4♠</td> <td>P</td> <td>3♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>P</td> </tr> </table>	W	N	E	S	P	2♠	P	1♠	P	4♠	P	3♥	P			P
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♦A led, the defense cashes two rounds of diamonds and plays a third diamond, which you ruff.

The key to this hand is to ruff the 4th round of hearts in dummy. It's counterintuitive to score a ruff when you have 3 cards in the suit, but since you can ruff the 4th loser high, the defense can't hurt you.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> 3 D </div>	N undefined ♠ J107 ♥ J853 ♦ AK54 ♣ Q8	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th style="width: 10%;">W</th> <th style="width: 10%;">N</th> <th style="width: 10%;">E</th> <th style="width: 10%;">S</th> </tr> <tr> <td>2♣</td> <td>3♣</td> <td>4♣</td> <td>1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>4♠</td> </tr> </table>	W	N	E	S	2♣	3♣	4♣	1♠	P	P	P	4♠
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W undefined ♠ 42 ♥ KQ2 ♦ J3 ♣ AK10763	E undefined ♠ 653 ♥ A ♦ 10982 ♣ J9542													
S undefined ♠ AKQ98 ♥ 109764 ♦ Q76 ♣	4♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0													

♣A lead. Whenever the defense gets in, they play clubs.

You need to set up hearts, which means losing the lead 3 times. The defense will force you to ruff clubs 4 times: once on opening lead and the three times they get in on the hearts. You can't afford to ruff that many times in hand. You can only ruff twice, or a defender will have more trumps than you and you will lose control.

The answer is *not pulling trump* before playing on hearts. Notice that unless hearts are 4-0, there are no heart ruffs to worry about since they have 3 natural heart tricks. Now, you can ruff the 3rd and 4th rounds of clubs *in dummy*, preserving the trump length in your hand. Being forced to ruff too many times as declarer is called being tapped out.