

## 14. Declarer play – smoothing out those ruffs

This is part 3 of declarer play at suit contracts. We'll look at more aspects of ruffing, including what you can do about a threatened over-ruff. Sometimes you have to avoid an over-ruff, sometimes you don't mind a ruff or over-ruff. Let's see some examples.

**1.** You are playing a contract of 3 spades, after West, as dealer, opened a (weak) 2 hearts. West leads the ♥Q. Do you see any danger, and is there anything you can do about it?

Start out by counting your losers (as if you would forget to do that!)

There is the danger of a ruff that could turn one of your winners into a loser if you aren't careful, so make a plan!

♠	J 3		
♥	A 4 2		
♦	7 6 5		
♣	10 9 7 6 4		
		N	
		W	E
			S
♠	K Q 10 9 5 2		
♥	K 6 3		
♦	A 4		
♣	A 5		

**2.** Here West has bid diamonds, and starts out with the ace, king and queen of that suit. East plays high-low on the first two tricks. You counted 4 losers, 3 diamonds and a spade.

How do you play to the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of diamonds?

		♠	A 8 2		
		♥	K 9 4 2		
		♦	8 4		
		♣	K 9 7 5		
♠	J 10 4			♠	Q 7 5 3
♥	10			♥	J 8 7
♦	A K Q 6 3 2			♦	9 7
♣	Q 3 2			♣	J 10 6 4
		N			
		W		E	
					S
		♠	K 9 6		
		♥	A Q 6 5 3		
		♦	J 10 5		
		♣	A 8		
4 ♥ by South					

**3.** North opened the bidding with 1 club, South bid 1 spade, North raised to 4 spades (not a shutout!) South had extras so went in search of slam, and ended up in 6 spades. West leads the ♥Q. Plan the play.

		♠	A 9 7 6		
		♥	A K 7 6		
		♦	6 5		
		♣	A K J		
♠	8 2			♠	Q J 10
♥	Q J 10 2			♥	9 8 5
♦	Q 10 4 3			♦	9 8 7
♣	10 9 2			♣	6 5 4 3
		N			
		W		E	
					S
		♠	K 5 4 3		
		♥	4 3		
		♦	A K J 2		
		♣	Q 8 7		
6 ♠ by South					

**4.** This time your partner got carried away in the bidding, and put you in 6 spades, with only 25 HCP between you. The lead is a heart, saddling you immediately with at least 4 losers – a trump, a club (slow) and 2 hearts. How do you plan to play this one, and do you leave the boss trump out?

		♠	A 7 4		
		♥	7		
		♦	A Q J 10 5		
		♣	8 6 5 4		
		N			
		W		E	
					S
		♠	K 8 6 5 2		
		♥	A 8 3		
		♦	K 7 4		
		♣	A 9		

5. You get to a grand slam in clubs, and West leads a trump. Count your losers and you will realize that you need two heart ruffs in dummy. There is a danger of an over-ruff on the third and fourth round of hearts. What is your plan?

How would you play this hand if the contract were 6 clubs, not 7?

♠	K 9 8 2									
♥	8 7									
♦	A 10 8 3									
♣	K 5 2									
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	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	A 5									
♥	A K 6 5									
♦	K 7									
♣	A Q J 10 3									

6. Here you are in a 6 spade contract and the lead is the ♥Q. Your only losers seem to be in the diamond suit. If diamonds break reasonably well (3-3 or 4-2, about 84% of the time), you only need one diamond ruff to win and make the contract (the 5<sup>th</sup> diamond will be good). Plan the play.

♠	5	♠	K 9	♠	10 8 7 4									
♥	Q J 10 6 4	♥	A 9 7 5	♥	K 8 3									
♦	Q J 8 6	♦	A 4	♦	10 3									
♣	K 7 6	♣	A 10 9 5 3	♣	Q J 8 2									
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	N													
W		E												
	S													
♠ A Q J 6 3 2														
♥ 2														
♦ K 9 7 5 2														
♣ 4														
6 ♠ by South														

7. The contract is 6 hearts, and you count 3 losers. You will need to ruff two of them in order to succeed. West leads a spade. You win the spade and play 3 rounds of clubs, ruffing the 3<sup>rd</sup> round. Crossing back to hand with a spade ruff, you lead your last club. West ruffs with the 7. What now? And what would you have done if West had followed with a club on the 4<sup>th</sup> round?

♠	K Q J 8	♠	9 7 4 3 2	♠	10 6 5									
♥	10 7	♥	Q 5 2	♥	J 9 4									
♦	Q 10 7 4	♦	A 8 2	♦	J 5 3									
♣	Q J 2	♣	9 7	♣	10 8 5 4									
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	N													
W		E												
	S													
♠ A														
♥ A K 8 6 3														
♦ K 9 6														
♣ A K 6 3														
6 ♥ by South														

### Summary:

Sometimes you have to run the risk of an over-ruff, by ruffing low. This happens when you can't afford a high trump for that ruff.

When you need two winning ruffs in dummy, use your higher trump to ruff for the second ruff.

When you can ruff twice in dummy, but just one of the ruffs is essential, you it may be best to use the highest trump you can afford for the **first** ruff.

You can often avoid an over-ruff or an uppercut by defenders, through a loser-on-loser play that transfers a ruffing value from one suit to another.

When you have an inevitable trump loser, try to lose it at a time when defenders can't hurt you. That might be early in the play or late in the play.