

TRUMP MANAGEMENT LESSON

When you play a suit contract the first, and usually most important, decision you need to make is whether to start by pulling trumps. Fortunately there is a rule for you to follow which is never wrong.

YOU SHOULD ALWAYS PULL TRUMPS IMMEDIATELY -
EXCEPT FOR THOSE TIMES WHEN YOU SHOULDN'T

This lesson and the Deals that go with it will show you those times.

Always pull trumps immediately:

The contract is 4♥ and West leads the ♣J.

♠ 7 3
♥ AJ 9 4 2
♦ 9 6 4
♣ Q J 10

You have 3 losers in ♦s and 1 in ♣s.

You are ecstatic that West didn't lead a minor suit so you play your 3 high ♣s and discard a ♦ from dummy on the third one. Unfortunately East ruffs the ♠ and the defense takes their 2♦ tricks plus the ♣A.



This is a really basic example but I'll bet we have all seen it happen. Of course you should win the first trick, **THEN PULL TRUMPS**, then run the ♣s for the discard.

♠ A K Q
♥ K Q 10 5 3
♦ 8 7 3
♣ K 3

Too easy you say, and you are right. Probably everybody reading this would have pulled trumps.

Have you ever had someone, (your partner?), tell you that they couldn't pull trumps because the suit was too weak? Bad reasoning; with weak trumps and strong side suits you should lead trumps early and often.

The contract is 4♣ and West leads the ♣8.

♠ 7 4 3 2
♥ A K Q
♦ J 10 9
♣ K J 9

You have no losers in any suit except trumps.

And if the trumps split 3-2 you can HOPE to lose only 3 tricks there. So you should win the first trick and lead a trump - which you will lose. Win the next trick and play another trump - which you will lose. Win the next trick and lose one more trump if you like, it doesn't matter at this point.



But think what could happen if you didn't play on trumps at every opportunity. You could be leading high side suit cards and East ruffs a ♠ with the ♣10. Then West ruffs a ♥ with the ♣J. And East ruffs with the ♣Q, and West ruffs with the ♣K and somebody still has the ♣A. In other words the defenders had 5 high trumps and you let them make them all individually.

♠ 9 8 6 5
♥ J 10 9
♦ A K Q
♣ A Q 10

Point made.

Always pull trumps immediately: except when you need to ruff tricks in dummy:

The contract is 6♦ and West leads the ♦5.

♠ 8 5
♥ 9 6 5 2
♦ 7 4
♣ A K 7 4 2

You have 2 losers in ♣s and 1 in ♥s.

You can pull trumps, then discard the ♥ loser on dummy's high ♣, but you will still be left with the 2 ♣s.

A better play is delay pulling trumps. Play the ♠ A K 4, ruffing the ♣4 with dummy's last trump.



Then play a ♥ to your hand and now pull trumps.

You will still have 1 ♠ loser at the end but you will make the contract.

♠ A K 4 3
♥ A K 3
♦ A K Q J 9
♣ 5

Always pull trumps immediately: except when . . .
. . . you need the trump suit for entries:

The contract is 6♦ and West leads the ♣K.

♠ K Q 2
♥ 6 5 3
♦ 7 3 2
♣ 8 5 4 2

With a sure ♣ loser you need to have the ♦ finesse.

Suppose trumps split 3-1 (probable) and you pull them ending in dummy. You can then take the ♦ finesse but even when it wins you are doomed because you cannot repeat it.



Instead win the first trick and play ♠A then small to dummy's ♠Q. Now finesse the ♦ successfully and return to the ♣K, pulling the last trump. Finesse the ♦ once more and claim.

♠ A J 10 9 6
4
♥ A K
♦ A Q J
♣ A 7

Always pull trumps immediately: except when . . .
. . . you can't afford to lose the lead yet:

Perhaps the reason you can't afford to lose the lead yet is that you need to discard a loser quickly.

The contract is 5♣ and West leads the ♥Q.

♠ K Q 2
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 8
♣ Q 6 5 4 3

The ♥ lead has exposed your 2 ♥ losers early.

You can ruff the small ♦ in dummy, but you cannot avoid losing the Ace of trumps. If you lead a ♣ now the defenders will grab their ♣A and immediately cash their 2 ♥ tricks.



So before playing a trump you play 3 ♠s, discarding a ♥ on dummy's third ♠. Only then is it safe to start pulling trumps.

♠ A 4
♥ A 7 2
♦ K 5 4
♣ K J 9 8 7

Always pull trumps immediately: except when . . .
. . . you plan to play a cross-ruff:

The contract is 6♥ and West leads the ♦K.

♠ A
♥ Q J 9 7

You can win your 4 side suit high cards, then alternate ruffing 4 ♠s in dummy and 4 ♦s in your hand.

♦ 9 8 7 5 3
♣ A 7 5

One of the two keys to a cross-ruff is that you might not have enough winners if you play a round of trumps. In this deal, for example, you needed to make all 8 trumps individually; even one lead would have cost you two trumps for one winning trick.



The second key is that you must take any side-suit winners early. Here if you delay taking your ♣A and ♣K, one of the defenders might discard ♣s while you are playing the other suits and be able to ruff a ♣ winner late in the game.

♠ 9 8 7 4 2
♥ A K 10 8
♦ A
♣ K 6 4

**Always pull trumps immediately: except when . . .
. . . you plan a dummy reversal:**

A mistake made frequently by beginners is taking an early ruff in the long-trump hand. When you ruff in the short-trump hand it does two good things - it gives you an immediate winner and it also gives you an extra winner. When you ruff in the long-trump hand it gives you an immediate winner but it seldom gives you an extra trick.

Look at these three hands:

You are playing a ♥ contract and West leads the ♣ A K.

♠ K J 7 2
♥ K Q J
♦ 6 5 4 3 2
♣ 2

You can ruff 2 ♣s in dummy, the short-trump hand.

You will now make a total of 7 trump tricks, your 5 plus dummy's 2 ruffs.

Dummy's ruffs have actually gained you 2 tricks.



♠ A Q 10 9 8
♥ A 10 9 8 7
♦ --
♣ 5 4 3

You can ruff the second ♣ in your hand, the long-trump hand.

You could even ruff dummy's last ♣ if you wanted to, but it wouldn't help you.

Because ruffing in your hand hasn't gained you any tricks, you still only get 5 trump tricks.



♠ A Q 10 9 8
♥ A 10 9 8 7
♦ A 6
♣ 3

Ruff the second ♣ in your hand with the ♥A.
Play a ♥ to dummy's ♥J.

Ruff dummy's third ♣ in your hand.

Play a ♥ to dummy's ♥Q.

Ruff dummy's last ♣ with your last ♥.

Play a ♣ to dummy's ♣K.

Pull the opponents' last trump with dummy's ♥K, discarding your ♦ loser.
Overtake dummy's ♣J and your hand is good.



You actually made 6 trump tricks, 3 ruffs in your hand, and the 3 you pulled trumps with in dummy.

♠ A Q 10 9 8
♥ A 10 9 8 7
♦ A 6
♣ 3

This is called a Dummy Reversal - because you used dummy's hand to pull trumps with, and took the ruffs in your own hand.

**Always pull trumps immediately: except when . . .
. . . the only trump left out is the master trump:**

The contract is 6♥ and West leads the ♠A.

♠ 7 2
♥ K 5 4
♦ A 3
♣ A K Q J 10
9

You ruff the ♠A and start pulling trumps with the ♥K, then the ♥A. West follows with the ♥3, then discards a ♠ on the second ♥ play so you will lose a trick to East's ♥ J 10 9 8.

You continue with the ♥Q which leaves you with just the ♥7 remaining in your hand while East has the master ♥J. Should you play the final trump?

Heck no! If you did there would be no stopping the avalanche of ♠s they would play! Instead, just start running dummy's ♠s until East gets frustrated and ruffs with the ♥J. Of course that now leaves you with a trump to stop the ♠s.



♠ --
♥ A Q 7 6 2
♦ K 9 8 4 2
♣ 4 3 2

Despite the above suggestion, there is a time when you do not want to leave the master trump left out - when dummy has a long suit to run but has no outside entries. Change the previous hand around.

The contract is 6♥ and West leads the ♠A.

♠ 7 3 2
♥ 5 4
♦ 4 3
♣ A K Q J 10
9

You ruff the ♠A and start pulling trumps with the ♥A, then the ♥K. West follows with the ♥3, then discards a ♠ on the second ♥, so you will lose a trump trick to East's ♥ J 10 9 8.

Suppose you pull just one more trump with the ♥Q, then switch to ♣s, leaving East with the master ♥J. No good. East will ruff the second or third ♠ and even though you will have trump control you won't have a way back to dummy's good ♠s.

Instead you go ahead and force East's ♥J out with your ♥7, still leaving you with the ♥6. If East plays a ♠ you can ruff with the last trump and then run the ♣ suit uninterrupted.



♠ --
♥ A K Q 7 6 2
♦ A 9 8 4 2
♣ 3 2

The last word:

Deal 1