

Making a Plan of Action
(May 10, 2021)

You've counted your losers (see April 26, 2021 notes) and identified possible ways to eliminate them (see May 3, 2021 notes). Now it's time to make your plan for playing the hand. An important factor to consider is the **ORDER** in which you need to :

Draw Trumps

Knock out honors to set up your winners in a side suit

Eliminate loser(s)

Let's look at the following hand with respect to the timing factor.

K10xx

Contract: 4S

KQx

xxx

Opening Lead: King of diamonds

Qxx

AJxx

Ax

Axx

KJ10x

Losers: (Master Hand is South because it has more shape.)

Spades = 1 (two-way finesse)

Hearts = 0

Diamonds = 2 (one loser is unavoidable; one can be pitched on the hearts)

Clubs = 1 (unavoidable)

Total Losers = 4 (2 unavoidable and 2 avoidable)

Making a Plan:

(1) You will have to take a two-way finesse in spades—hopefully, the bidding may provide a clue.

(2) You need to pitch a diamond on the hearts.

(3) You need to knock out the ace of clubs.

Which of the above needs to take priority?

If you finesse in trumps at trick two and you're wrong, the defense will cash two diamonds and the ace of clubs for down one.

If you play clubs at trick two, the defense will win the ace of clubs, cash two diamonds. You'll have to guess the spade situation to make the contract.

Thus, the first priority needs to be trying to eliminate any immediate losers—in this case the diamond loser. Play three rounds of hearts, pitching a diamond and then start on trumps and clubs.

The opponents can cash only one diamond when they get the lead. You can ruff the third round. Note that getting rid of the diamond loser took top priority—you have to do it immediately—or not get the pitch until it is too late. **TIMING IS THE KEY!**

ENTRIES

Your plan may require the lead to be in one hand or the other. Say, you wish to finesse this suit:

xxx

AQx

Obviously, you need to be in the dummy. If your plan involves ruffing a loser, then you need the lead to be in the master hand. A shortage of entries in either hand can influence the order in which you play the hand. If you are in the dummy for the last time, you have to take the finesse NOW!

Example 1.

xxxx

xx

Axx

xxxx

AK

QJ1098xxx

x

Kx

Contract: 4H

Opening Lead: King of diamonds

(The opponents did not bid.)

Losers: Spades = 0
Hearts = 2
Diamonds = 0
Clubs = 2

Total Losers = 4

Ways to eliminate: Hearts (unavoidable, you must lose the A/K of hearts unless they collide!)

Clubs (one loser is unavoidable; you might be able to avoid a second club loser by leading toward the king hoping the ace is in the East hand.)

Plan of Play:

Ideally, you would draw trumps first and then lead toward the king of clubs. But, the opening lead has taken out dummy's only entry in the ace of diamonds. You are forced to take the club finesse NOW.

Example 2.	KQJ xxx Qxxx Kxx	Contract: 4H Opening Lead: Queen of clubs (The opponents did not bid.)
	xx KQJ10xx Axx Ax	

Losers: Spades = 1 (unavoidable)
Hearts = 1 (unavoidable)
Diamonds = 2 (one unavoidable; the other loser, you have two ways to eliminate, i.e., lead toward the queen of diamonds or pitch on the spades)
Clubs = 0

Total Losers = 4

Plan of Play:

Three of your losers are unavoidable. The success of making this hand lies in finding a way to avoid a second diamond loser. You have two options, one a finesse and the other a pitch. The pitch has a higher chance for success. Note that the ace of spades must be knocked out before you can take the diamond pitch.

Remember that one of the key elements needed for a pitch is an ENTRY to the short hand. Dummy's only sure entry is the king of clubs. Therefore, take the queen of clubs in your hand. Because of the shortage of entries in the dummy, you must prioritize in your plan. At trick 2, lead a spade. You want to establish the spade winner while you still have the king of clubs as an ENTRY. When the defense wins the ace of spades, they will either return a club which you take and cash the remaining spades, pitching a diamond loser; or, they will lead a diamond. Win the ace and proceed to pitch a diamond on the good spades. NOW, you can safely proceed to pull the trumps.

When to Draw Trumps

No plan is complete until you have answered the question, “Is there any reason not to draw trumps?”. This is a critical part of your planning stage. By this time, you have counted your losers, identified and selected a way or ways to eliminate them and started to make your plan of play as outlined above.

Drawing trumps should be the first priority of your plan UNLESS there is a reason to delay. Three basic reasons exist for not drawing trumps. All three are based on timing and entries.

1) Ruffing in the short hand is the most common reason not to draw trumps immediately. You need them to ruff loser(s) in the short hand.

Kxxx	Contract: 6C
x	
Axxx	Opening Lead: Queen of diamonds
Axxx	
	(The opponents did not bid.)
AQx	
Axxx	
Kx	
QJ10x	

South is the master hand due to having stronger clubs. You have no spade losers, three heart losers, no diamond losers and one club loser. The heart losers are avoidable if you can ruff three of them (or two of them and pitch one on the fourth spade should it set up). The club loser may be avoidable if the club finesse works.

With four potential losers in the hand, ask yourself if there is any reason to not draw trumps. YES! You need dummy's trumps to ruff out your heart losers.

Defensive Strategy: Should your side gain the lead, play a trump. A trump lead on the opening lead would most likely have defeated this hand.

2)Playing the hand as a crossruff is another reason for not drawing trumps immediately. Your plan for playing the hand is trying to score as many of your trumps separately as is possible. The LAST thing you want to do on a crossruff is to ever lead trumps. To do so would be to take out two of your trumps on the same trick; thus, preventing you from scoring them separately.

Defensive Strategy: If you suspicion the declarer will play the hand as a crossruff, lead a trump on the opening lead.

Axxx

x

Axxx

Kxxx

Kxxx

Axxx

x

Axxx

Contract: 4S

Opening Lead: King of hearts

(The opponents did not bid.)

When you have ruffing possibilities in both hands and no clear path to making your contract, consider playing the hand as a crossruff. In playing a crossruff, it is easier to start by counting winners outside the trump suit and cashing them first. Then try to take the rest of your tricks via a crossruff.

Plan of Action:

Win Ace of hearts. Cash A/K of clubs. Cash the A of diamonds. Then begin crossruffing the remainder of the hand—ruffing diamonds in your hand and hearts in the dummy.

We will have an entire lesson devoted to the crossruff at a later time.

3) Preserving an entry in the dummy is the third reason why you might delay drawing all the trumps. When the only entry to the dummy exists in the trump suit, you may have to delay drawing all the trumps in order to make use of the entry.

KQx xxxx xxx xxx AJ9xx AQJ AKQJ A	Contract: 7S Opening Lead: 3 of spades (The opponents did not bid.)
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Is there any reason to delay drawing trumps? Yes! You have two heart losers which can be avoided by double finessing in the heart suit. Note that the only entries to the dummy are the king and queen of spades. You will need to use both to finesse the heart twice, if needed.

NOTE: These players overbid to reach the grand slam. Normally, it is not a good slam when you have to depend on a finesse to make the hand. Not to mention—a double finesse!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! But, you have one, and only one way, to make this hand—TAKE IT!

One final note: If you have a weak trump fit between the two hands, do not put off drawing trumps.

xxxx AQx AKJ10x x	Jxxx KJxx Qx AKx	Contract: 4S Opening Lead: 8 of diamonds
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In this hand, you want to start drawing trumps immediately. You have everything else in the deck. Your goal must be to prevent the opponents from scoring their big trumps (AKQ10x) separately. By leading trumps, you are able to collect two of theirs at one time.

Next Week: The Moysian Trump Fit

