

The Crossruff*
(June 7, 2021)

General Principle: Normally, it is not profitable for declarer to use up his own trumps for the purpose of ruffing losing cards residing in the dummy. The exception would be when you are playing the hand as a dummy reversal—the focus of next week's lesson.

The theory behind the ruff is to score a trick with a trump which would otherwise be useless. If the declarer has five solid trumps in his own hand, he does not need to ruff anything to convert any one of those five trumps into an “extra” winner.

However, if the dummy has three (four) small trumps, the declarer can try to score extra trump tricks by ruffing losers with dummy's trumps. There are hands in which the declarer decides that the only way to make the contract is to try to score separately the trumps in dummy and in his hand. Enters the **CROSSRUFF!**

*Material used in the preparation of this lesson taken from Goren's New Bridge Complete by Charles Goren.

A crossruff is indicated whenever the declarer, by counting up his high card winners and the number of ruffs, reaches the total number of tricks required to make the contract.

Example 1.	AJ93		Contract: 4S
	8		
	8753		Opening Lead: King of diamonds
	A652		
			Losers: Spades = 0
			Hearts = 3 (avoidable)
74		65	Diamonds = 3 (unavoidable)
Q1052		KJ76	Clubs = 0
KQJ10		A9	
K108		QJ943	Total Losers = 6
	KQ1082		
	A943		
	642		
	7		

The defenders cash three diamond tricks and shift to a trump. Declarer has three losers in hearts which he can avoid by ruffing them in the dummy. He must NOT draw trumps. Rather, he should cash the ace of clubs and crossruff clubs and hearts—making his contract of 4S.

Note: Recall that when you play a hand as a crossruff, you should count winners rather than losers. Thus, 1C, 1H, 5 trumps in the South hand, and 3 ruffs in dummy making a total of 10 tricks.

Of course, the danger in any crossruff is that sooner or later one of the opponents will be able to overruff either you or the dummy. In this particular hand, the danger virtually disappears since after dummy ruffs one heart small and the declarer ruffs one club small, all the rest of trumps are high.

General Principle: When playing a crossruff, always cash your side suit winners early in the play. The reason is that when you start the crossruff, one of the opponents may run out of the suit that is being ruffed. He will discard in one the suits in which you hold the A/K. He may ultimately ruff your A/K. How devastating for you!!!!

Example 2.	AJ93		
	8		
	A32		Contract: 6S
	A7653		Opening Lead: 2 of spades!!!!!!
6542		VOID	
KJ1065		Q7	Possible bidding of the Hand:
Q10		J87654	Jacoby 2NT
Q10		KJ982	Splinter Bid
			2/1 Game Forcing Bid
	KQ1087		
	A9432		
	K9		
	4		

South is the declarer at a contract of 6S and might make all the tricks if permitted to cash his side suit winners and then crossruff in clubs and hearts, scoring all nine trumps separately. But, a very savvy (lucky!!) trump lead by West causes you to have to play the above hand with much more care. There is no danger of an overruff because you are able to win the first spade trick with the 7.

Losers: Spades = 0
 Hearts = 4 (at least three are avoidable)
 Diamonds = 0
 Clubs = 0

Total Losers = 4 (3 avoidable, one unavoidable what with the spade lead)

The dummy still has three trumps which can be used to ruff three of the four heart losers. At trick two, declarer should cash the ace of clubs and the A/K of diamonds. Next, he should ruff three hearts in dummy and clubs in his hand to make his contract of 6S.

Note that if the declarer fails to cash his A/K of diamonds before beginning the crossruff of hearts in dummy and clubs in his hand, by the third round of clubs, West will discard one of his diamonds. Now the declarer cannot safely cash both the A/K of diamonds. West will ruff setting the contract.

In a true crossruff, you must not ever draw trumps. You need to score dummy's trumps and your trumps separately. If you have a good side-suit such as the AKxx opposite the QJxx, do not use the crossruff technique.

Example 3. KJ97
 6
 QJ75
 A764

Contract: 7S (Yikes!)

Opening Lead: King of clubs

653	42
9875	KQJ10
43	1092
KQJ10	9832

Bidding: S N
 1D 1S
 3S 4S
 4N 5H*
 7S

(E/W did not bid)

AQ108
A432
AK86
5

*Shows 2 Keys, no Q of
of spades

Designate North as the Master Hand:

Losers: Spades = 0
 Hearts = 0
 Diamonds = 0
 Clubs = 3

Total Losers = 3

North has three club losers. If she crossruffs this hand, she will lose the ability to pull trumps. Also, she will be unable to win the four side-suit diamonds. North must ruff all of club losers in the dummy.

Play of the Hand:

- 1) Win king of clubs with the ace.
- 2) Ruff a small club in dummy.
- 3) Lead diamond to your queen.
- 4) Ruff another club.
- 5) Play ace of hearts.
- 6) Ruff heart to get back to your hand.
- 7) Ruff the final club with the ace of spades. Why?
- 8) Return to your hand to pull the rest of trumps.
- 9) Cash the three remaining diamond tricks.
- 10) Claim 13 tricks!

How to set up a crossruff

Crossruffing, trumping in both hands, is very committal. If it fails (an opponent overruffing, for example), there is no Plan B. For, with both your trump lengths shortened, the opposing trumps can never be drawn. Only embark on a crossruff when you have no sound alternative line (e.g., setting up a side-suit, ruffing in one hand but not both, etc).

The key ingredients of a crossruff are:

- 1) Shortages opposite length in two suits (alternate hands).
- 2) Good trumps, including spot cards necessary to prevent an overruff.

You can work out how many trump tricks you need by counting up how many top tricks you have outside trumps. This will tell you whether or not you need to risk ruffing low.

Example 4.	KJ8		Bidding: South	North
	9		1S*	2D
	A9542		2H**	4S***
	A832			
95		643	*A Rule of 20" opener, the	
Q10852		KJ4	high-card points added to the	
Q8		K10763	lengths of the two longest suits	
KQJ9		106	reaching 20.	
	AQ1072		**Showing the 5/4 shape of hand.	
	A763			
	J		***Now knowing of the 8-card	
	754		spade fit and, with the asset of	
			the singleton heart, the values	
			for game.	

Losers: Spades = 0
Hearts = 3 (avoidable by ruffing in dummy) Contract: 4S
Diamonds = 0
Clubs = 2 (unavoidable) Opening Lead: K of clubs

Total Losers = 5

This hand should be played as a crossruff. All the necessary ingredients are present:

- 1) Shortage opposite length in diamonds and hearts
- 2) Good trumps in both hands.

Play of the Hand:

- 1) Win king of clubs with ace.
- 2) Win ace of hearts.
- 3) Ruff three of hearts in dummy with the eight of spades.
- 4) Cash the ace of diamonds.
- 5) Ruff the two of diamonds with the two of spades.
- 6) Ruff the six of hearts with the jack of spades.
- 7) If you ruff the five of diamonds with the seven of spades, West will overruff with the nine and lead a spade to set the contract. Note: You need to ruff the third diamond with the 10 of spades, not the seven. Watch spot cards carefully. You must prevent the opponents from overruffing at all costs.

In conclusion, if this hand is played correctly, the hand should make 4S: Ace of hearts, Ace of diamonds, and Ace of clubs, plus seven of his eight trumps. He should never risk an overruff of his third diamond.

Assignment: How would you play the following hand?

	K1093		Bidding: North	South
	Void		1C	1H
	AK85		1S	4S
	Q10854			
			Contract: 4S	
84		752		
A764		QJ10	Opening Lead: Ace of Hearts (?)	
J7		Q10963		
J9732		K6		
	AQJ6			
	K98532			
	42			
	A			

Review of Opening Leads:

Recall from Lesson One (January 11th) that one of the three basic types of opening leads is the **forcing lead**. The following hand illustrates the importance of making a forcing lead.

	7		Contract: 4S by East
	A8632		
	10954		Opening Lead: Ace of Diamonds
	1096		
643		AKQJ10	
QJ5		K1097	
7632		J	
AKJ		Q85	
	9852		
	4		
	AKQ8		
	7432		

South's best lead is the Ace of diamonds, NOT his singleton heart. He has four trumps. He wants to force East to ruff by leading his longest suit. Lay out this hand and play it. You will see that declarer cannot make this hand if N/S lead diamonds at every turn, whenever they get in the lead.

When North wins with the heart ace, he should continue leading diamonds and not try to give South a ruff in hearts. East cannot make this hand on this line of defense. East will eventually lose control of the hand because South will end up with more trumps than the declarer.

Winning Tricks With Low Cards in a Suit

A surprisingly large number of tricks are won with low cards, simply because all of the higher cards in the suit have been played. You must keep track of the played cards or you will not realize it when the low cards become good tricks. This does not mean that you have to rack your brain trying to remember every card in every suit in every deal. But, any suit that offers a chance to win tricks with low cards deserves your utmost attention.

The simple method is to subtract the number of total cards the opponents hold in the suit. During the play of the hand, watch if they discard a card from the suit you are wishing to establish. Then, each time the suit in question is led, keep a count of the number of cards the opponents play. At some point, you will know that they have no more cards in the suit.

Example 1. AKQ2

543

In example one, there are six cards missing. If you cash the ace, king, and queen and see both opponents follow suit throughout (the suit has divided 3-3), you can win a fourth trick with the two. Also, watch for an opponent to discard a card from this suit during the play of the hand.

Example 2. A8765

KQ2

In example two, there are five cards missing. If you cash the king, queen and ace and the suit has divided 3-2, then you can win two more tricks with dummy's remaining low cards—five tricks in all.

NOTE: The order in which you cash your high cards can be important for reasons of communication: the first two plays should be the king and queen. Then, when you win the third trick with the ace, the lead will be in the dummy so you can cash the remaining low cards. Say, that you had won the third trick in your hand with the king or queen, you would have to play another suit to get the lead back in the dummy (and sometimes you may not have an entry).

A GOOD GENERAL RULE TO FOLLOW IS WHEN YOU ARE RUNNING A LONG SUIT, ALWAYS CASH THE HIGH CARDS IN THE SHORT HAND FIRST.

Example 3. A8765

 K32

In example three, two extra tricks are available with low cards if the missing five cards divide 3-2. But, this time you must give up a trick along the way. It is sometimes best to give up the trick before cashing the top cards in case you do not have an outside entry to the dummy's hand. The way this works is to lead a low card and play a low card from the other hand! This is known as a **ducking play** – a play frequently used in the play of notrump contracts. When you regain the lead, cash the king first and then the ace so the lead will be in the dummy. If the suit has divided 3-2, the two remaining low cards in the dummy are now good.

Next Week: The Dummy Reversal