

The Endplay  
(May 24, 2021)

Just what is an endplay? It is a tactical play where a defender is put on lead at a strategic moment in the hand. The endplay is an attempt to improve the odds of winning a trick in a particular suit by forcing an opponent to break the suit, or to lead into a tenace, or to give you a ruff/sluff.

Indicators that an endplay might be possible include:

1) trump length in both hands—needed to pull the opponents' trumps and still have one left in each hand for a ruff/sluff possibility.

2) a card combination in a side suit that will benefit you by having an opponent break the suit, i.e., Jxx opposite Qxx; KJx opposite A10x; Kx(x) opposite xx(x); or, Ax opposite Qx.

3) a second side suit that can be eliminated in both the declarer's hand and dummy's hand. It could be an equal-length suit or an unequal-length suit that can be eliminated by ruffing or stripping.

4) a third side suit that is of equal length in both hands. You need to delay playing the last card in this suit, a loser, until the elimination has been completed (see no. 3 above).

Example 1.

K  
J854  
A87  
Q9732

Contract: 5C

Opening Lead: K of diamonds

10752	Q9863
AQ	109732
KQ10942	65
8	5

AJ4  
K6  
J3  
AKJ1064

Losers: Spades = 1 (avoidable by ruffing in the dummy)  
Hearts = 2 (finesse or possible endplay of West)  
Diamonds = 1 (unavoidable)  
Clubs = 0

Total Losers = 4

Indicators: Club length in both hands.  
 You need to force West to lead the heart to you.  
 Strip the spade suit.  
 Lead the diamond to endplay West.

West leads the king of diamonds which is taken with the ace. The declarer is faced with the danger of losing one diamond and two hearts unless he can force West to lead hearts for him.

Play of the hand:

1. Take the king of diamonds with the ace.
2. Cash the king of spades.
3. Lead a small club to the South hand and draw the remaining trumps
4. Lead the ace of spades and discard a small diamond from the dummy.
5. Ruff the jack of spades.
6. Throw in West by leading the diamond. (Note: The opening lead marks West with the queen.)
7. West is faced with leading another diamond giving South a ruff/sluff. Or, he can lead his ace of hearts, setting up declarer's king for his eleventh trick.

Example 2.

Q10742  
 AK8  
 942  
 J3

3  
 109763  
 K7  
 AKQ97

J9  
 QJ5  
 Q1086  
 8642

AK865  
 42  
 AJ53  
 105

The Bidding:	S	W	N	E
	1S	2C	3C	P
	4S	all pass		

Contract: 4S

Opening Lead: Ace of clubs

Losers: Spades = 0  
Hearts = 0  
Diamonds = 3  
Clubs = 2 (unavoidable)

Total Losers = 5

The declarer's dilemma is that he needs to hold his diamond losers to one trick. His only hope is to force West to lead the suit to him. In order to accomplish this outcome, he needs to make it impossible for West to lead anything else but a diamond.

Play of the Hand:

- 1) West plays the A/K of clubs and shifts to a heart. Notice that West could not lead a third club which would have given South a welcomed ruff/sluff! He decides to lead a heart.
- 2) South takes the heart and cashes two rounds of trumps. Note: West will be unable to lead a trump if he gets in.
- 3) Declarer cashes the ace of hearts and ruffs a heart in his hand (this is the elimination play-- see Indicator #3 above). This makes it impossible for West to lead a heart safely as it would give the declarer a ruff/sluff.
- 4) The bidding has indicated that West holds the king of diamonds. He has shown up with one spade and three hearts. Your best chance seems to be that West holds exactly two diamonds, one of which is the king.
- 5) The declarer plays his ace of diamonds and throws in West with a small diamond. Whether West returns a heart or a club, declarer discards the losing diamond in the dummy and ruffs in his hand.

Defenders: West can try to thwart the declarer's plans by throwing his king of diamonds under the ace. To no avail. You can now enter the dummy with a trump and lead a low diamond toward your jack.

Example 3.

A432  
J432  
A8  
KQ4

Contract: 4S

Opening Lead: 3 of diamonds

76  
A109  
J943  
10865

85  
K75  
K10765  
732

Losers: Spades = 0  
Hearts = 3  
Diamonds = 1  
Clubs = 0

Total Losers = 4

KQJ109  
Q86  
Q2  
AJ9

In this hand, the heart suit is a major problem. If you have to play it yourself, you will lose three tricks in the suit. Thus, you must get your opponents to lead hearts for you. If they are “thrown in” and lead something else other than hearts then you must discard a heart from your hand and ruff in the dummy. Remember to ruff always in the short hand (hand with the fewer number of trumps).

Play of the Hand:

- 1) Win the ace of diamonds. You could play low, hoping that West has led from the king. However, looking at the heart situation, you want to find a way to **FORCE** an opponent to lead the suit for you.
  - 2) Draw trumps.
  - 3) Play three rounds of clubs (Indicator #3 above—the strip suit).
  - 4) Exit with the queen of diamonds (Indicator #4—the “throw in” suit).
  - 5) No matter which opponent wins the trick, he must either lead a heart limiting your heart losses to two tricks or concede a ruff/sluff. If given the latter, declarer should discard a heart from his hand (the shorter heart hand) and ruff in dummy. Note: you don't gain by ruffing in your hand and throwing a heart from dummy. Always make the discard from the hand holding the fewer number of cards in the suit being led by the opponents.
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While most endplays normally occur near the end of the hand, occasionally an opponent is endplayed at trick one. Endplays that occur early are usually the result of one opponent's hand being overloaded with the outstanding high cards. Anything the opening leader makes gives the declarer a trick. Once the declarer determines that the opening leader has most of the points, he can keep "throwing in" that opponent. The leader is forced to lead away from his high cards; thus, giving you an extra trick each time he is put on lead.

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Technique to set up an endplay:

- 1) Pull trumps.
- 2) In the side suit to be eliminated (the strip), void your hand and dummy's of that suit.
- 3) In the throw-in suit, an equal-length suit, cash any sure winners and then surrender the lead.

<p>Example 4.</p> <p>A98 QJ109 Q976 32</p>	<p>K7654 A5 A105 976</p> <p>VOID K7632 432 QJ1054</p>	<p>Contract: 4S</p> <p>Opening Lead: Queen of hearts</p> <p>Losers: Spades = 1 (unavoidable) Hearts = 1 (unavoidable) Diamonds = 1 (avoidable) Clubs = 1 (unavoidable)</p>
	<p>QJ1032 84 KJ8 AK8</p>	<p>Total Losers = 4</p>

Is there a possible endplay in this hand?

- 1) Long trumps in both hand? YES
- 2) A side suit that will benefit if the opponents lead/break the suit? YES--diamonds.
- 3) A side suit that can be eliminated in declarer's hand and dummy's hand? YES—hearts.
- 4) A side suit that can throw an opponent on lead at the right time and simultaneously eliminate the suit in declarer's and dummy's hands? YES—clubs.

Play of the Hand:

- 1) Duck the queen of hearts and win the jack of hearts continuation with your ace.
- 2) Pull all of the trumps which will take three rounds. Note: by eliminating all of the opponents' trumps, you have eliminated a trump lead as a safe exit for the opponents. It also leaves you with two trumps in both hands so that a ruff/sluff is still in the picture.
- 3) Now that you have eliminated the heart suit and pulled all the trumps, you are ready to play the A/K of clubs and throw-in one of the opponents with your last club in each hand. In this case, East will win and have a choice of leading a diamond into dummy's A10x or of giving a ruff/sluff in either clubs or hearts. Both plays lead to a guaranteed 10<sup>th</sup> trick.

NOTE: You do not want to have to “guess” which way to finesse the diamond. By setting up an endplay situation, the problem is solved.

Let's look at one final example of an endplay setup.

Example 5.	K7	Contract: 6S
	AJ106	
	A853	Opening Lead: 4 of diamonds
	AQ6	
	AQJ10643	Losers: Spades = 0
	4	Hearts = 0
	K7	Diamonds = 0
	1042	Clubs = 2
		Total Losers = 2

An elimination play virtually ensures this contract.

Play of the Hand:

- 1) Win the diamond lead with your king.
- 2) Play one round of trumps.
- 3) Lead diamond to the ace.
- 4) Ruff a diamond with a high trump.
- 5) Lead trump to dummy's king.

6) Ruff the final diamond. (completion of the strip)

7) Draw the remainder of trumps.

8) Lead a heart. If West plays low, finesse the 10. If East wins, any return will give you the contract.

9) If West plays an honor when the first heart is led, play the ace and return the jack. It doesn't matter who has the outstanding honor, for you can discard one club on the jack of hearts and the other on the 10.

By setting up an endplay, you eliminate putting all your hopes for making this hand on a successful finesse of the queen of clubs. Recall from a previous lesson that anytime you can get the opponents to lead a suit for you, it usually proves to be beneficial.

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Assignment:	AJ5	Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	AQ102		1S	P	P	2H
	743		P	4H	All Pass	
	J64	Contract:	4H			
	K82	Opening Lead:	King of diamonds			
	KJ9843					
	Q					
	A102					

West opens with the king of diamonds and continues with the ace, which you ruff. After drawing the adverse trumps, how do you proceed?

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Last week's assignment: You are in a contract of 4H. Plan the play.

AQ  
K843  
AJ5  
J43

872	10653
75	J1094
Q32	96
Q1075	AK8

KJ84  
AQ6  
K10874  
96

Contract: 4H

Opening Lead: Ace of clubs

Losers: Spades = 0  
Hearts = 0-1  
Diamonds = 1(avoidable)  
Clubs = 2 (unavoidable)

Total Losers = 3 – 4

East cashes the A/K of clubs and leads a third club. Ruff with the six of hearts. Play the ace and queen of spades. Lead a small trump to your ace and cash the queen of trumps. Lead the king and jack of spades. If East trumps, he can get out by leading his last heart to your king. By now, you have a count on all the hands. East has shown up with 3 clubs, 4 spades, and 4 hearts. Therefore, he has only 2 diamonds. West has shown up with 3 spades, 4 clubs, 2 hearts and 3 diamonds. The percentage play is that West likely holds three diamonds to the queen. Lead a small diamond to dummy's king and finesse the jack of diamonds.

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Next Week: Informal Session: Hands to Analyze