

On Drawing Trump



For several months we have been looking at notrump plays. In this article we'll consider an important aspect of declarer play in a trump contract, namely when to draw trump.

Remember that unlike notrump contracts where we count winners as a first step to planning our play, in trump contracts we typically start with counting losers.

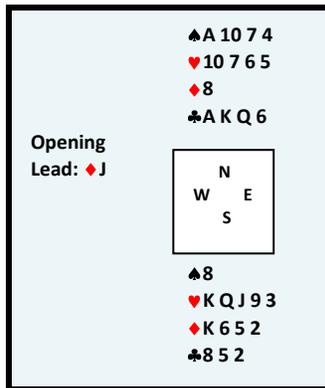
The bidding ends, your LHO makes his lead, partner displays dummy and (after thanking her) you determine where and how many losers you have (usually from the perspective of your hand).

In the board diagrammed to the right, you are in a 4♥ contract with a ♦J lead. You count your losers. With this lead, you should now score your ♦K, leaving four losers: three diamonds and the ♥A.

There is nothing you can do about losing the ace of trump, so you must concentrate on eliminating the diamond losers. If clubs split 3-3 (a fair chance – 36%) you can

dump a losing diamond on a good club. Unless a miracle occurs (and they never do in my articles) your ♠10 will never set up for a second place to dump a diamond. Your only other hope is to ruff diamonds in dummy.

East wins the ♦A and switches to a low spade, which you win with your ♠A. Now what? In trump contracts a key consideration is when to pull trump.

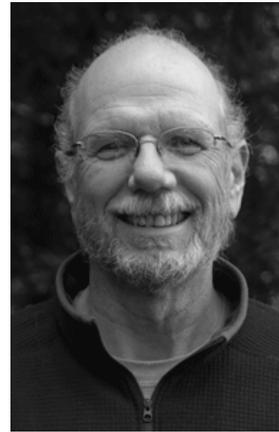


Cue Goldilocks and the three bears who have different approaches to handling the trump suit.

Papa Bear clears out his opponent's trump as soon as he gets in the lead.

Momma bear has a phobia about drawing trump and puts it off.

Baby Bear, who partners with



Jim Jackson

Baby Bear's Strategy

Goldilocks in the mixed pairs, knows each hand is different and does it just right.

If Baby Bear doesn't plan on using Dummy's trump for ruffing (or has more than enough trump), he draws trump to avoid the nasty surprise of having an opponent ruff one of his good tricks.

Similarly, when Baby Bear needs some ruffs in Dummy to make his contract, he always makes sure to draw trump in a manner that ensures he still has enough trump in dummy to get his ruffs when the time comes.

In this board, Baby Bear knows if he can ruff at least one diamond, he will make the contract. If he can't ruff a diamond he'll need to rely on clubs splitting 3-3.

Therefore, he can always afford two rounds of trump before he takes a diamond ruff. Note that if

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Notrump and the Queen of Spades

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he could only afford one round, then he could not lead trump before taking his ruff. He would need to come to his hand by ruffing a spade and then take his diamond ruff.

Why couldn't he play one round of trump? Because the opponent with the ♥A could win the first trick and lead a second trump, foiling your plans.

But in this case Baby Bear can afford two rounds of trump and so calls for a low heart from Dummy. East pitches a diamond!



Whenever something surprising like a 4-0 split in trump shows up, stop and reconsider your plan.

Does this change the number of remaining losers you have? Not with careful play. Baby Bear plays his ♥K, which West ducks.

Now what? Get the ruff now!

Yes, you can probably cash the ♦K and then lead another diamond for your ruff, but you'll make your life a lot more complicated if West ruffs your good ♦K.

If you immediately take the ruff, you can pull trump and still cash the ♦K and make your contract. It turns out clubs split 3-3 and you make 11 tricks given the full layout of the board presented on the right.

Let's see what happens if Momma Bear had been Declarer.

Since she avoids leading trump on trick 3, she chooses a spade, which she ruffs in hand. She then leads a low diamond and ruffs on the board.

She still doesn't want to lead hearts and now has two choices. She can hope hearts split 2-2 or 3-1 (an excellent chance – 90%) and lead another spade to ruff in hand. She can then ruff another diamond in Dummy.

That done, Mama Bear finally tries to draw trump—only to find the bad trump split has caused her to lose trump control. She will save the contract, but the overtrick is no longer available.

Her other choice is to play clubs. She discovers the 3-3 split, but has no way to cash the fourth club since West can ruff the trick. Mama Bear again loses her overtrick.

♠K J 3 2	♠A 10 7 4	♠Q 6 6 5									
♥A 8 4 2	♥10 7 6 5	♥—									
♦J 4	♦8	♦A Q 10 9 7 3									
♣J 10 9	♣A K Q 6	♣9 6 3									
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Papa Bear's bull headed approach to always immediately lead trump doesn't work well either.

After he discovers the 4-0 trump split, he plows ahead and leads another trump. West lets that win as well. On the third trump lead, West takes his ace and has the audacity to lead the fourth trump.

Papa Bear no longer has any hearts in Dummy available to ruff a diamond. He'll make his contract because clubs happen to split 3-3, but the overtrick is only a dream.



Baby Bear Celebrates a Top Board