

## PLAYING AND DEVELOPING LONG SUITS by Maritha Pottenger

Long suits are a tremendous asset, in both suit contracts and no trump. Often, you will get the best results if you look for ways to set up tricks in your long suits.

In no trump, Declarer and Defenders are competing to set up their long suits. **Many of the standard unblocking plays are used by both sides to make sure that long suits can be run.** (Remember: Honors from the short side first.) As an example, if your partner leads Queen of a suit against no trump and you have Kx or Ax, you should play the honor on your partner's queen and then lead low next time. (This sets up your partner's suit to run immediately. If you don't unblock, partner may never get the rest of that long suit.) The lead of Queen against no trump should be EITHER from QJ10x(x)(x) OR from KQ109(x)(x). When your partner leads the queen against no trump, and you have the jack, discard the jack under your partner's queen immediately! That is an unblocking play that allow your partner to push the suit again and again. Once Declarer's Ace is knocked out, your partner will get lots of tricks in the suit.

**When entries are a problem, it is imperative to lose a trick EARLY in your long suits,** in order to preserve a way to get back to all those extra tricks. Playing NT, for example, with AKxxxx of clubs in Dummy opposite xx in your hand, with no outside entries in dummy, you MUST duck the first club trick completely. (Play a low club from both hands.) On the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of clubs, play the Ace. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of clubs, play the King. If clubs are 3/2, you will get 5 club tricks.

**When running long suits, check the spot cards to make sure you won't get locked in the wrong hand.** Sometimes you have to do some unblocking (playing fairly high cards under higher cards in order to get out of your own way). As an example, if you hold AK8432 in Dummy opposite Q1097 in your hand and Dummy has no outside entries, you must play the queen first (honors from short side first), then play the 10 under the Ace and the 9 under the King, then the 7 under the 8. If you don't get rid of your 10 & 9 under the Ace and King, you will take the 4<sup>th</sup> round of the suit in your hand and never get to cash that good 5<sup>th</sup> card.

**When playing in suit contracts, remember that cashing top cards—and trumping one or two rounds—will often set up a long suit for you.** When given a choice between developing a long side suit and other options, developing the long side suit is usually best. As an example: You hold QJ542 87 AQJ4 J10 opposite A763 A109 7 AK954 and the contract is 6S with a heart lead. They have found your weak spot, and you must find the King of spades onside AND doubleton. You could try a diamond finesse, or a ruffing finesse in diamonds, or to trump some diamonds on dummy before pulling trump, but the best approach is to figure on setting up your club suit. If clubs are no worse than 4-2 (which they will be about 80% of the time), you can set up Dummy's 5<sup>th</sup> club with two ruffs. Take the Ace of hearts. Diamond to your Ace and put the queen of spades on the table. If King covers, kill it with Ace, and return to your Jack. If trump (obligingly) break 2-2, cash the AK of clubs and then (if needed) ruff a club. In this case, the queen of club falls doubleton (along with your J10) so you can cash the AK and 9 of clubs (discarding your losing heart). Then, trump a club (setting up your 5<sup>th</sup> club). Trump a diamond on dummy. Pitch a diamond on your 5<sup>th</sup> club. Trump a heart in your hand; trump a diamond on dummy; trump a heart in your hand. Making 7! Sometimes you'll have to ruff a suit 3 or 4 times to set it up, but it's worth it.

Remember, that **4-4 trump fits will often make one trick more than 5-3 trump fits** because Declarer can often pitch two losers on the 5-card suit. Example: You have  $A_{xxx} Ax A_{xx} A_{xxx}$  and open 1NT. Partner has  $KQJx KQ109x 9x xx$  and bids Stayman (NOT Jacoby transfer). You can make 11 tricks in spades: 4 spade tricks; 3 top hearts; ruff a heart; 5<sup>th</sup> heart is good; two minor suit Aces. In hearts, since the suit breaks 4/2 (likely), you lose 1 diamond, 1 club and 1 heart and only make 10 tricks.