

## SOMETIMES A RUFF AND SLUFF IS THE *RIGHT* THING TO DO! by Maritha Pottenger

Early in our bridge careers, we learn that giving Declarer a ruff-and-sluff (leading a suit in which both Declarer and Dummy are void, allowing Declarer to discard a loser from one hand and trump in the other hand) is a terrible, terrible act.

This is generally true. A ruff-and-sluff allows Declarer to discard a loser that s/he could not have gotten rid of on his/her own.

However, there are some situations when giving a ruff-and-sluff is the correct defensive move. Following are some situations:

- 1) **Ruff and sluff does not give up a trick.** When Declarer and Dummy have mirror or almost mirror distribution, Declarer will be looking for an end play. If Declarer throws the defenders in (gives up a trick) at a point when they must give a ruff and sluff or lead a particular suit and “find” the queen for Declarer, the defenders should give the ruff and sluff if that suit is divided 4-4 between Declarer and Dummy. The reason is: one ruff-and-sluff does not help Declarer. S/he will still have 3 cards opposite 4 cards and must “find” the queen on his/her own. This is even more important if one defender has the queen and the other has the jack. Leading the suit will give away two tricks (when Declarer & Dummy owns 10 and 9 as Declarer will play for split honors in defenders' hands), whereas the ruff-and-sluff guarantees one more winner for the defenders.
- 2) **Ruff and sluff may be essential for a trump promotion play.** Sometimes the defenders can see that there are no more tricks available in the side suits. So, their only option is to try for a trump trick. This may involve an “uppercut.” whereby one opponent trumps with an intermediate trump card (and is overruffed), but that promotes a trump in the other defender’s hand to winning rank. A typical situation would be when one defender has Qx and the other defender has Jx. If one defender leads a suit in which everyone else is void, partner can trump with the Jack and Declarer will overruff with King. But now, partner’s Queen will take a trick!
- 3) **Ruff and sluff may be vital to *prepare* for a trump promotion.** Occasionally, a defender must give **two** ruff-and-sluffs in order to get that uppercut situation. Again, **all side suit winners must be cashed beforehand.** The first ruff and sluff allows partner to become void in the suit led. The second ruff and sluff (usually after defender wins a trump trick) provides the vital uppercut for a trump promotion.
- 4) **Ruff and sluff will force Declarer or Dummy to trump, and may aid a defender with long trumps to take control of the hand.** Again, if NO side suit winners are available, it is OK to give the ruff-and-sluff. If Declarer is in a 4-4 fit with a 4-1 trump break and is forced to ruff once in Dummy and once in his/her own hand, s/he will lose control—one defender has more trump than Declarer OR Dummy does.

**Remember, if the ruff-and-sluff will give Declarer the game-going or slam-going trick, you must lead the remaining (4<sup>th</sup> suit) instead—even if it risks leading away from a King or Queen.** When Declarer pulls trumps and eliminates a side suit and then gives up the lead in a 2<sup>nd</sup> side suit (and Declarer and Dummy are now void in that second side suit), COUNT DECLARER’S TRICKS and DISTRIBUTION. If a ruff-and-sluff gives up the one trick that Declarer needs, then lead the 4<sup>th</sup> suit and hope for the best. (This will be the case when Declarer needs only ONE more trick for his/her game or slam.) You must hope partner has a helpful honor to supplement your honor in that 4<sup>th</sup> suit, from which you must lead.