

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 (4th 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 2nd 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 4th 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 4th suit, from which you must lead.