

END PLAYS AT NO TRUMP

by Maritha Pottenger

End plays at no trump are also possible, even though the ruff-and-sluff option of a suit contract is not available. They do, however, require a bit more counting by Declarer. The basic principles are:

- 1) **Eliminate suit A** from one opponent's hand
- 2) **Eliminate suit B** from that same opponent's hand
- 3) Give that opponent the lead ("throw him/her in") with suit C—a trick or trick(s) to which s/he is **ALWAYS** entitled anyway. Please note that the trick(s) cannot be so many that it would set your contract. That means, if you are in a small slam, the opponent can only have ONE cashing trick when you throw him/her in.
- 4) Opponent is FORCED to lead Suit D which is a "**free finesse**" for you. (A "free finesse" means you get to play 4th hand with a holding such as AQ or AKJ—and are guaranteed that extra trick.)

I recommend making a habit, when you are counting trick at the beginning of the hand and making a plan, that whenever you mentally say: "**I could take such-and-such finesse,**" you mentally add the idea of: "**Or, perhaps, I could find an end play and avoid taking that finesse.**"

Also, whenever the bidding strongly suggests that a finesse is doomed to lose, you should search earnestly for an end play.

An example to clarify. You open 1NT with AQJ2 K543 AQ 456 and partner gently deposits you in 6NT. Left hand opponent leads the 10 of hearts and Dummy comes down with K78 AQ3 456 AKQ3. You can count 11 top tricks: 4 spades, 3 hearts, 3 clubs, and one diamond. You have 3 chances for an extra trick: hearts could divide 3-3 (less likely with the lead); clubs could divide 3-3; or the diamond finesse could work. Mentally you add: "**OR, I could find an end play and AVOID taking the diamond finesse**"—chance #4. Since you need LHO to lead for a "free finesse" in diamonds, the most likely throw-in suit would be hearts (if LHO started with only 4 hearts). Leads of Jacks and 10's are normally from length when defending no trump, so chances are decent that LHO has 4 (or more) hearts.

General principle: **Play the suits that do NOT matter before the suits that do matter.** Here, spades do not matter. You always have 4 spade tricks. Clubs and hearts matter because you have no spots and would need a 3-3 break or a favorable discard—which is why you play something else first, giving the opponents every opportunity to help you out with their discards. You will play hearts after clubs because hearts are your possible throw-in suit. You cash 4 spade winners, discarding a low diamond from dummy. LHO follows to 4 rounds and RHO follows to 2 rounds. [**NOTE: As long as each opponent follows to the first TWO rounds, you are home free.** If the 6 outstanding spades divide 4-2—most likely—everyone is then out. If they divide 5-1—highly unlikely—then someone has a good spade to cash and you CANNOT give them the lead in another suit. Do NOT bother adding up to 13 spades. Simply watch the first two rounds.] You cash three rounds of clubs. LHO follows to 2 rounds, and discards a diamond on round 3. RHO follows to 3 rounds (and has a good club remaining in his or her hand).

Steps 1 and 2 are complete. LHO has no more spades (step 1). LHO has no more clubs (Step 2). You cash a 2nd round of hearts and everyone follows. Good news! At this point, hearts are either 4-2 or 3-3! You cash a 3rd round of hearts and LHO follows while RHO shows out, throwing a diamond. You play a low heart and LHO takes the 9, grimacing, to lead a diamond. RHO plays the Jack and you win your queen! Poor LHO started with: xxxx 1098x Kxx xx and could not escape the end play. You take great satisfaction in anticipating that some

Declarers will assure their partners: “I could not make the slam. The diamond King was off-sides.”

End Plays Rock!