

## End Plays

End plays, as a group, are declarer plays that force an opponent to concede the final tricks in a hand. They include the *throw-in play* and the *elimination play*. Despite the name “end play,” if declarer does not plan these plays early in the hand, he or she may not be able to execute the play when the time comes. These plays involve losing a trick at the right time to the correct opponent, so they must be as carefully planned as any play that involves winning a trick.

### The Throw-in Play

- In executing a *throw-in play*, declarer “throws in” an opponent at a time when that opponent must lead away from a key honor or into a tenace. Effectively, declarer loses a trick in order to gain at least two tricks.

Auction: You—West—Dummy—East

2C - Pass - 2D - Pass

2NT - Pass - 3NT - Pass→

The opening lead is the ♥Q. Count your tricks and plan your play *before* you play a card from dummy. If you don’t think carefully, you won’t make this contract!

You’re the declarer with eight tricks after the Ace of diamonds is forced out: one spade, two hearts, three diamonds, and two clubs. Hearts don’t appear to be breaking evenly, so the only source for the ninth trick is the spade suit. If you take the spade finesse – *and it loses* – you will go down. The opponents will win one diamond, three hearts, and one spade.

#### Example 1:

Dummy:       ♠J9  
                  ♥6542  
                  ♦K65  
                  ♣8743

♠ K64	♠ 87532
♥ QJ973	♥ T
♦ A742	♦ 93
♣ J	♣ QT965
♠ AQT	
♥ AK8	
♦ QJT8	
♣ AK2	

**If you can’t afford a losing finesse, make the opponents help you out.** If you make West lead a spade towards the ♠AQT, it doesn’t matter who holds the ♠K; you will win a trick with the ♠Q and make your contract. You must *lose a trick* to West at a time when West will have to lead a spade towards the ♠AQ.

- The only suit in which you can guarantee a loss to the West hand is the heart suit. If you decided to hold up at trick one, you can no longer make this contract. Your ♥8 may be the most valuable card in your hand. It is your *exit card*, a losing card you plan to play at the correct time. Win the heart lead drive out the ace of diamonds.
- Win the heart return, noting that East started with the singleton ♥T.
- Cash your winning diamonds, noting that West started with five hearts and four diamonds.
- Cash the Ace and King of clubs, noting that West started with three spades. Here is the *end position*.

**Example 1 (end position):**

Dummy:	♠J9	
	♥6	
	♦--	
	♣87	
♠ K4		♠875
♥973		♥--
♦--		♦--
♣--		♣QT
	♠AQT	
	♥8	
	♦--	
	♣2	

*Throw in* your LHO by playing your ♥8 and watch what happens.

Note that if your RHO is the player holding the spade King, you will have performed an elegant end play only to tie all the rest of the field who simply took the spade finesse. With this hand, you got a great score!

- \* Think about executing a throw-in play when losing a finesse will cost you your contract or a good matchpoint score.
- \* You must retain an *exit card* to throw-in your opponent, so watch for these plays at trick one, **not** trick ten!

**The Elimination Play**

Trump contracts add another factor to the play of any hand. The *elimination play*, or "strip and throw-in" play is an end play unique to trump contracts. Declarer pulls trumps leaving at least one trump in dummy and hand; then, "strips" the hands of the opponents' safe exit side suit cards. He then "throws in" an opponent, forcing that opponent to lead away from a key honor, into a tenace, or concede a *ruff-sluff*.

**Example 2:**

Dummy:	♠AK53	
	♥T2	
	♦A5	
	♣AT973	
♠T94		♠QJ86
♥KJ95		♥873
♦KQJ6		♦98732
♣52		♣4
	♠72	
	♥AQ64	
	♦T4	
	♣KQJ86	

Auction: You—West—Dummy—East			
1C -	Pass -	1S -	Pass
2C -	Pass -	2D! -	Pass
2H -	Pass -	3C -	Pass
3NT -	Pass -	6C -	Pass→

The opening lead is the ♦K. Count your tricks and plan your play *before* you play a card from dummy. If you don't think carefully, you won't make this contract!

Before playing from dummy, count your tricks and plan your play. You have nine top tricks and can ruff two spades for two more tricks. Your only source for the twelfth trick appears to be the heart Queen, but if the heart King is off-side, you will go down. You have a losing diamond and no long suit winners on which to pitch that loser. You have lots of trumps, so pulling trumps and leaving at least one in dummy and one in hand is no problem. All the conditions that should suggest a successful *elimination play* are present.

**Example 2 (end position):**

Dummy:	♠--		
	♥T2		
	♦5		
	♣AT9		
♠--		♠--	
♥KJ9		♥873	
♦QJ6		♦987	
♣--		♣--	
	♠--		
	♥AQ64		
	♦T		
	♣Q		

- Can you figure out how to set the stage? How can you reach this end position?
- Once the stage is set, what do you do?

You now play the carefully preserved ten of diamonds. You know your LHO must win this trick, and you've stripped his hand of all safe exit cards. If he leads a heart, your Ace-Queen of hearts is good, regardless of who holds the King. If he leads another diamond, you pitch a heart from dummy and ruff in your hand (*ruff-sluff*). You can then play the ♥A and dummy's trumps win the final tricks.

\* Think about elimination plays when you have extra trumps, the need to find one more trick, and a sure loser. Because the elimination play is similar to the throw-in play, you must retain an exit card, and that sure loser becomes an asset, not a detriment.

**The Partial Elimination Play**

Elimination plays are no problem when declarer has enough trumps to pull all defenders' trumps, leaving at least one trump in both dummy and hand. A *partial elimination play*, one in which declarer must leave a trump in one opponent's hand, can sometimes be used to maximize the chances to make a contract.

**Example 3, Contract: 6S**

Dummy:	♠QJT
	♥AK
	♦AQT92
	♣Q43
Lead: ♣2	
	♠AK987
	♥QJ
	♦865
	♣AK6

Consider this example. If you pull all the trumps, your contract depends on finding the missing diamond honors. If you run the ♦8 and the ♦K takes the trick, you're home free. If the ♦8 loses to the ♦J, you still have a problem.

Prepare the hand for an elimination play, but try the finesse after pulling only two rounds of trumps. If RHO, wins with the ♦K, you're home free. If RHO wins with the ♦J and *does not have the last trump*, you're home free. If RHO wins and leads the last trump, you're back to finessing for the diamond King. Try it!

## Avoiding the End Play

How does a defender avoid the elimination or throw-in play? Sometimes he cannot, but successfully foiling an end play is a very good feeling.

- \* Watch out for an elimination play when declarer, with extra trumps, begins stripping the hand of side suits and you have a suit or suits, which, if led by you, will give declarer the contract.
- \* Think carefully when you hold most of your side's high card points and you also have a suit or suits, which, if led by you, will give declarer the contract.
- \* To execute an end play, declarer must lose a trick. To avoid an end play, *do not win that trick*. Find a way to let your partner win the trick instead.

### Example 4:

Dummy:      ♠QJ76  
                 ♥AQ4  
                 ♦AQ5  
                 ♣862

You:  
♠53  
♥KJ5  
♦JT93  
♣KT74

Auction: South—You—North—Partner

1S - Pass - 2NT! - Pass  
3NT! - Pass - 4NT - Pass  
5D\* - Pass - 5NT - Pass  
6D\* - Pass - 6S - Pass→

\*1430 RKC, specific kings

- South has shown a balanced hand with five spades, about 16 HCPs, 3 key cards, and the ♦K.
- *You lead the ♦J.*

- Declarer wins your ♦J in dummy; partner follows with the ♦2.
- Declarer now pulls trumps in two rounds, partner following suit.
- Declarer plays the ♦Q and a low diamond to the ♦K in hand; partner follows suit.
- On trick six, declarer plays the ♥3 towards the ♥AQ4 in dummy.

Hopefully, you've been thinking as declarer has been playing.

- Declarer has pulled trumps and stripped all diamonds from his hand and your partner's hand; therefore, if you win a trick and lead a diamond, you give declarer a ruff and sluff.
- Declarer should hold the ♣AQ for his roughly 16 HCPs; therefore, if you win a trick and lead a club, you will give declarer an extra club trick.
- If you play a low heart on this trick, declarer will play the ♥Q and win the trick. Declarer can then play the ♥A, and *throw you in* with the ♥K. There's nothing you can lead safely; therefore, *don't win a heart trick*. Play the ♥J and plan to play the ♥K under dummy's ♥A. Hopefully, partner can win the third round of hearts with the ♥T and lead a club through declarer.

**The full deal:<sup>1</sup>**

Dummy:     ♠QJ76  
              ♥AQ4  
              ♦AQ5  
              ♣862

♠53	♠92
♥KJ5	♥T982
♦JT93	♦842
♣KT74	♣J953

♠AKT84  
♥763  
♦K76  
♣AQ

You have a good partner. Declarer plays the ♥3; you follow with the ♥J; the ♥Q is played from dummy; *partner plays the ♥T!* This lets you know that partner holds the ♥9 and enough hearts to safely play this card. Now you can lose your ♥K without worries.

- If declarer holds the ♥T instead of partner, has your play cost your side anything?
- If you're not convinced, find out what happens if you play a low heart at trick six.

- **Despite being called an *end play*, if these plays are not planned at trick one, the magic may not be possible.**
- **When executing end plays, losing a trick is the winning play – unless you're in a seven-level contract. 😊**