

Making a Claim - Part One

What is a *claim*? This example will illustrate the concept.

You are the declarer in a no trump contract. You've just won a trick with the Ace of spades in your hand, and now, with only five tricks left to play, your hand is: ♠- ♥AKQJT ♦- ♣-. Of course, you could play out your hearts one by one, but why should you? You know you're going to win all five tricks, so don't waste everyone's time. **Make a claim.** Declarer makes a claim when he tables his hand, indicating that he will take the rest of the tricks. In the example hand, you would put your cards face up on the table and state, "I'm going to win the rest of the tricks by playing my hearts from the top down."

- ♣ When a claim is made, **all play ceases**. You cannot change your mind and say, "Wait. I think I'd better play it out." And the opponents cannot say, "I don't see it. Let's just play it out." There is too much information available for the hand to be "played out" fairly. If this happens, the director must be called.
- ♣ Declarer must **state a line of play** explaining how he will take a certain number of tricks. Statements such as, "I have the rest," do not constitute a line of play. If declarer does not state a line of play, or you disagree with declarer's claim, call the director immediately - but that is the subject of our next lesson.

Why Make a Claim?

There will come a time when you make a claim only to discover that you forgot an outstanding trump or an ace. The director is called to the table, and instead of making your contract, you're set one trick. You'll say to yourself, "I'm never going to claim again!" Don't give up. Claiming properly is an important skill to develop.

- ♣ To make a claim, a declarer must plan his play and state it logically. This is the most important skill in improving your declarer play and is more necessary than knowledge of any fancy technique.
- ♣ Bridge is a timed game. You may spend time playing out one hand unnecessarily, only to face a difficult hand with only three minutes left on the clock. Neither your partner nor the opponents will be happy with you. If you're repeatedly late, the director may even penalize you.
- ♣ In higher-level competition, playing out a hand unnecessarily is considered unethical.

A Few Good Tips

- ♣ If you're in a trump contract, make sure you've pulled all the opponents' trumps before making your claim. If your plan requires that you leave a trump outstanding, make sure your statement of play includes your knowledge of that trump.

- ♣ It's safest to make a claim when you won the last trick, but occasionally you will make a claim when an opponent is on lead. If you do, your statement must include all possible plays by the opponents.
- ♣ Does your plan include taking a finesse? If so, your statement must include your proof why that finesse will be successful, or an alternate statement if that finesse loses.

A Few Examples

♠ ---
♥ KQ
♦ ---
♣ Axxx

♠ Ax
♥ x
♦ 9
♣ xx

♠ xx
♥ xx
♦ ---
♣ xx

♠ xx
♥ ---
♦ AT3
♣ x

You're in a diamond contract, and you need to take the rest of the tricks. Of course, you could "play it out," but the director already called the round, and she's standing impatiently behind you. **Make your claim!**

It's a trump contract, so make sure you've pulled all the trumps: "I'm going to play the ♦ A to pull the last trump."

You need to get rid of your losing spades: "Then, I'm going to get to dummy with the ♣ A and pitch my losing spades on the good ♥ KQ - leaving only good trumps in my hand."

See how easy it is? And your partner and the director are both very happy with you.

♠ ---
♥ Kx
♦ ---
♣ xxx

♠ Q
♥ x
♦ Axx
♣

♠ ---
♥ Jx
♦ Kx
♣ x

♠ x
♥ AQx
♦ ---
♣ A

This one's a little trickier. You're in a spade contract, and you must lose the ♠ Q. If you think about it, though, you can win the rest of the tricks - and you can claim! Just make your statement carefully.

"I'm going to play a small heart to the King, then come back to the Ace of hearts. I'm going to play the ♥ Q and the ♣ A. You can trump with your ♠ Q whenever you wish, but I will then take the rest with my small trump and remaining good cards."