

# "Get the Children off the Street"

## Sound Strategy or Terrible Tactic?

If you learned to play bridge at your parents' kitchen table, you probably heard many maxims: "Cover an honor with an honor." "Eight ever, nine never." "Get the children off the street." You know now that bridge is a problem-solving game, and if you want to play it well, following old maxims might not be your best strategy. When playing a trump contract, how often is a maxim telling you to pull the opponents' trumps as soon as possible good bridge?

The trump suit is a very powerful weapon in a declarer's arsenal, but its main strengths do *not* lie in pulling the opponents' little trumps. The high cards in any suit can win tricks. A trump suit also has these abilities.

- ♠ Like any suit, a trump suit may serve as vital transportation. If trumps are played too quickly, that critical transportation may be lost.
- ♠ The trump suit serves to control opponents' high cards in side suits. If a declarer plays trumps prematurely, he might lose control of the hand.
- ♠ The trump suit has the almost magical ability to create extra tricks. Consider this holding.

West: ♠AQT9	East: ♠KJ87
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Despite the fact that you hold the top eight cards in this suit, if you were playing a no trump contract, you could take only four tricks with it. If spades were the trump suit, this holding could theoretically result in *eight tricks*! If you pulled trumps first, assuming a normal trump break, you would limit yourself to only five tricks.

Keep these trump suit powers in mind as you play these hands.

### HAND 1.

	♠AQ92	
	♥6432	
	♦J74	
	♣A3	
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦		♦
♣K		♣
	♠KJT8	
	♥AQ7	
	♦KQ	
	♣J752	

Auction (South dealer):

1NT	– Pass	– 2C	– Pass
2S	– Pass	– 4S	– Pass
Pass	– Pass		

You're the declarer in this 4♠ contract. Did you call immediately for the ♣A, and, with those wonderful trumps beckoning, pull all the opponents' trumps in three rounds? After all, that time-honored bridge adage says, "Get the children off the street. Never let the opponents trump one of your tricks with their small trumps."

Before calling for a card from dummy, stop and plan your play. Count HCP (High Card Points), count each suit's length, assess any bidding clues, and, assuming normal breaks in each suit:

**Count your losing tricks:** no spades, one or two hearts, one diamond, and one club. There is no way to get rid of the diamond or club loser, and counting on a successful finesse to make a contract should be reserved for desperate circumstances.

**Count your winning tricks:** four top trumps, the ♥A, and the ♣A is six tricks. Forcing out the ♦A gives you two more tricks. You need a strategy that will give you an additional two tricks. *When you need more tricks, examine the trump suit.* The surest plan you have is to ruff two clubs in dummy and prevent the opponents from taking two heart tricks at the same time. I've given you a strategy. Plan your play.

*By counting both losers and winners, you should be able to see several lines of play, and then determine the best lines and the order in which each suit must be attacked.*

As declarer in a suit contract, *should you pull the opponents' trumps first?* If you see no problems in the play of the hand, it is probably safe to pull the opponents' trumps. In this example, there are problems. If you pull trumps, you will not have two trumps left in dummy to ruff two clubs. Unless the heart finesse is successful, you will not make this contract, if you pull trumps first.

**Hand 1.** Your LHO can't hurt you, so let him hold trick one. Win whatever he leads and force out the ♦A. Even if your opponents lead trumps, they can only do it twice. You will always be able to ruff your two clubs in dummy. You might even be able to take the heart finesse for an overtrick!

**HAND 2.**

	♠J95	
	♥AK6	
	♦A76	
	♣Q764	
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦K		♦
♣		♣
	♠AQT62	
	♥Q5	
	♦954	
	♣KJT	

Auction (South dealer):

1S	– Pass	– 2C	– Pass
2NT	– Pass	– 4S	– Pass
Pass	– Pass		

**Count your losing tricks:** no hearts, two diamonds, one club, and possibly one spade, if the ♠K is in the wrong hand. That might be one loser too many.

**Count your winning tricks:** three hearts, one diamond, and one spade. You have three club tricks, once ♣A has been forced out, and you will always be able to come to at least three more spade tricks. If the spade finesse works, you should take a lot of tricks. If you take that finesse now and lose, what happens? You need to get rid of one of those known losers before risking your contract on a finesse. What's your plan?

**Hand 2.** You need get rid of a diamond loser immediately. Win trick one and play three rounds of hearts, pitching a losing diamond from your hand on the third heart. *Now* take the spade finesse. Lead the ♠J from dummy.

### HAND 3.

	♠543	
	♥Q52	
	♦KQJT3	
	♣84	
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦		♦
♣Q		♣
	♠A72	
	♥AKJT4	
	♦87	
	♣AK5	

Auction (South dealer):

1H –Pass – 2H – Pass  
4H –Pass – Pass– Pass

**Count your losing tricks:** two spades, no hearts, one diamond, and no clubs, *if* you ruff your losing club in dummy.

**Count your winning tricks:** five top trumps, one spade, and two clubs. You plan to ruff your third club in dummy – with the ♥Q, of course – and you will always be able to get at least one diamond trick. Voila! Ten winning tricks and three losing tricks. You execute your plan and make your contract. This is a fine result for a team game or a rubber bridge game, but you're in a matchpoint game. The opening lead gave you a chance for overtricks, and you didn't take that chance. You made two errors that cost you a fine matchpoint score.

1. You ignored the potential diamond tricks in dummy.
2. You forgot that the trump suit is sometimes more valuable as transportation than as trump-puller.

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**Hand 3.** Win the first trick and force out the ♦A. Win whatever is returned and play two high hearts from your hand. If both opponents follow suit, pull the last trump with dummy's ♥Q and pitch losers on dummy's diamonds. If trumps break badly, you can fall back on ruffing your club.

### HAND 4.

	♠A63	
	♥QJ9	
	♦742	
	♣A653	
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦A		♦
♣		♣
	♠K8	
	♥AKT62	
	♦T863	
	♣K9	

Auction (South dealer):

1H –Pass – 1NT!– Pass  
2D –Pass – 3H – Pass  
4H –Pass – Pass – Pass

**Count your losing tricks:** no spades, no hearts, no clubs, and three diamonds. After all, you can ruff your fourth diamond in dummy, if necessary. Piece of cake!

**Count your winning tricks:** five top trumps, two spades, and two clubs. Oops! That's only nine tricks. But wait, diamonds might break three-three, so your fourth diamond will be a trick; or, you can ruff it in dummy.

Unfortunately for you, your LHO (Left Hand Opponent) now leads a trump. You win this trick in dummy, and if you call for a diamond before thinking things through, you may not make this contract. *If* the diamonds do not split, your fourth diamond will not be a trick. *If* the opponent who wins each diamond trick leads a trump, you won't have any trumps left in dummy to ruff your last diamond. You need a better plan.

*If* you ruff dummy's small spade and two small clubs in your hand – with your high trumps – you can pull the opponents' trumps with dummy's high trumps.

**Hand 4.** Win the heart in dummy. Play two rounds of clubs, ending in dummy. Lead a club from dummy and ruff with a *high* trump. Play two rounds of spades, ending in dummy. Lead a spade from dummy and ruff with a *high* trump. Lead your last low trump to dummy and ruff your last club with your last trump in hand. That will give you two spade tricks, two club tricks, three ruffs in hand, and dummy's three trumps. Ten tricks appear, just like magic. Congratulations! You have just executed a *dummy reversal*.

## HAND 5.

	♠KJ94	
	♥8	
	♦A7654	
	♣K54	
♠2		♠
♥		♥
♦		♦
♣		♣
	♠AQT87	
	♥A654	
	♦9	
	♣A87	

Auction (South dealer):

1S – Pass – 4H!<sup>1</sup> – Pass  
 4NT – Pass – 5H – Pass  
 5NT – Pass – 6C – Pass  
 6S – Pass – Pass – Pass

**Count your losing tricks:** no spades, one club, no hearts *if* you ruff three hearts in dummy, and no diamonds.

**Count your winning tricks:** five top trumps, one heart, one diamond, and two clubs. You need three more tricks – those three hearts you plan to ruff in dummy. Do you know the basic principles involved when executing a *cross-ruff*?

**Hand 5.** Always play your side suit winners before beginning your cross-ruff. Otherwise, an opponent might be able to pitch that suit and ruff one of your winners. Your trumps are all high, so there should be no difficulties with this hand, even with the 4-0 trump break!

<sup>1</sup> Note that conventional bids above 3NT are alerted *in the first round of bidding*. Beginning with opener's first rebid, conventional bids above 3NT are *not* alerted. Instead, they require a *delayed* alert. If your side is declaring, one player must tell the opponents before the opening lead is made. If your side is defending, partner of the conventional bidder must tell the opponents before the opening lead is made.

## HAND 6.

	♠T943	
	♥A65	
	♦AQ3	
	♣K62	
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦		♦
♣J		♣
	♠8765	
	♥K2	
	♦K64	
	♣AQ84	

Auction (South dealer):

1C –Pass – 1S – Pass

2S –Pass – 4S – Pass

Obviously, you each thought the other had good trumps! ☺

**Count your losing tricks:** no hearts, no diamonds, no clubs, but you will lose at least three trump tricks!

**Count your winning tricks:** two hearts, three diamonds, and three clubs. You can ruff a heart in hand for a ninth trick, and if trumps are 3-2, you will get your tenth trick with the last trump. Your only problem lies in the trump suit. Don't let the opponents take those high trumps separately! ***Get those children off the street!***

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**Hand 6.** Win the club lead, and lead a trump. Win whatever the opponents return and lead another trump. If both players follow suit, you'll only lose one more trump trick. Let them take it whenever they choose and claim the rest.

### REMEMBER THESE WARNING SIGNS

- ♠ You need the trump suit for transportation. Don't pull trumps too soon.
- ♠ The opponents can run a side suit if your hand or dummy's is out of trumps. Don't pull trumps too soon.
- ♠ You have too many losers and must get rid of some quickly. Don't pull trumps too soon.
- ♠ You don't have enough winning tricks to make your contract – or get a good matchpoint score. Don't pull trumps too soon.

*Unless you see an obvious reason to postpone pulling trumps, it is usually right to get those children off the street at the first available moment. In at least 50% of the trump contracts you play, however, those obvious reasons exist.*

***Think before you act!***