

## End-plays or Elimination and Throw-in Plays

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There are many card combinations between declarer & dummy where the chances of winning a maximum possible number of tricks improve dramatically if only you can get a defender to lead the suit (sometimes either defender and sometimes just one particular defender). Here are some examples where declarer is South on the bottom (only one suit shown):

xx

Kx

If you or East leads you get your king 50% of the time when East has the A. If West leads the suit you always get your king!

AJx

K10x

If you play the suit you have a 50% chance of picking the right defender to finesse for the Q. If either defender leads, you always get 3 tricks!

Qxx

Kxx

If you play the suit you will only get two tricks if a defender has exactly Ax and you lead to the Q or K behind that defender and then duck from both hands next. However, if the defender with the A and any number of other cards in the suit leads that suit you will always get 2 tricks.

Jxx

Qxx

Your chances of making a trick are slim if you lead the suit (an AK(x..)) in one hand or an honor and one small card and you lead to the J or Q behind that hand. But you always win a trick if either defender leads the suit.

AQ9

742

If you play the suit you have a 50% chance of making 2 tricks. If you can get East to lead the suit you always make 2 tricks.

Qx

Ax

If you play the suit and defenders play properly you will only get one trick. If you can get the defender with the K to lead the suit, you make 2 tricks.

Jxx

Kxx

If you play the suit, you can lose all three tricks if the A & Q are located over your K & J, respectively. If they play the suit, you always get one trick.

There are many more combinations where you can do much better, or eliminate the need for a possibly losing finesse, if the opponents lead the suit.

**The goals of this lecture are to:**

1) Make you aware of thinking beyond the finesse – perhaps you can avoid a finesse if you can get the right defender to lead the suit you want him to lead – so think about ways to achieve this before you fall back on possibly losing finesses.

2) Highlight card combinations where you should automatically look for ways of getting the defenders (or the right defender) to lead a particular suit.

In addition, if you are a defender

3) Learn to watch out for suits to lead or avoid leading and ways to foil declarer when she tries to get you or your partner to lead (or not lead) one of those suits.

**Examples**

1)                   AJ10xxx  
                          xx  
                          Ax  
                          Qxx

                          KQxxxx  
                          Ax  
                          Kxx  
                          Jxx

You arrive at 4S and the KH is led. You see that you have a heart loser and at least 2 club losers, The key to making 4S will be avoiding 3 club losers – which you can always do if you can get the defense to lead clubs (or, just as good, give you a ruff and a sluff by leading a suit you are out of in hand and dummy). How can you achieve this? First eliminate all harmless leads of other suits and then let the defense win their heart trick. So, you win the AH and pull trumps and play A, K and ruff a diamond – that *ELIMINATES* any defensive exit card that would not help you. Next you *THROW-IN* the defense by playing a heart and they must either lead clubs for you or else give you a ruff in one hand and a sluff (of a club in the other hand) if they lead a heart or a diamond.

Note that if we change the North/South clubs to AJx opposite K10x, the same line of play will guarantee making 6S without having to guess who to finesse for the QC.

This example shows why these plays are often called *elimination* or *throw-in* plays rather than *end-plays*. After all, the key throw-in play occurred here at trick 6 or 7, not at the end of the hand.

That was an easy one. The next hand is similar, but requires a little more work.

2)

AJxx
Axxx
Kx
742
KQ10xxx
x
Axx
AQ3

West opens 3H , North passes, East passes and South bids 3S. North sees slam possibilities and bids 4H. South Blackwood's and ends up in 6S. West leads the KH and East follows when dummy's A is played.

South can see a sure club loser but 12 tricks if the K of Clubs is on-sides. Is there a better play than pulling trump and taking the club finesse? Wouldn't it be nice if West had to lead clubs or give up a sluff and a ruff? Here's how you go for that ending.

Start by playing the AS. Both follow. Then ruff a heart and lead to the JS, pulling the last trump, and then ruff a third round of hearts. Next play the KD, AD and ruff a diamond. This is the position with the lead in dummy.

x
x
-
742
KQ
-
-
AQ3

Now you lead dummy's last heart, pitching the 3 of clubs, and claim. You started by *stripping* diamonds from your hand and dummy and then did a loser on loser throw-in play to endplay West! Note that given West has at least 5 hearts for his pre-empt, you are "cold" when spades split 1-2.

The next hand occurred at the BCA on 4/22 (Board # 12)

3)	942	
	AJ104	
	J7	
	K954	
K106		AQ53
K8		532
AKQ52		9843
A102	J87	Q3
	Q976	
	106	
	J876	

West was declarer in 3NT and North led the 4 of hearts. Declarer won the K and could count at least 10 to tricks, assuming diamonds were not 4-0. Declarer plays top tricks and discovers spades split and there are 11 top tricks. Are there any chances for another trick? Wouldn't it be nice if the defender with the K of clubs had to lead that suit while you still had the A and the Q. Then dummy's QC would be a 12<sup>th</sup> winner. So, declarer watches discards carefully as she plays off her 10 top tricks, saving the A of clubs for later. South keeps 3 clubs (J87) and North comes down to the AH and the K9 of clubs. West watches the heart discards carefully and notes only the A remains, so it is safe to lead a heart. North wins and has to lead a club away from the K at trick 12. Declarer makes the Q and A of clubs for a total of 12 tricks.

What was necessary for this to work? Declarer had to carefully watch the heart pitches to be sure that North has only the A left when thrown in. What if South had the KC? Then you still make 11 tricks. The endplay gives you a chance for 12 tricks in this case – not a guarantee.

Could the defense have done anything? Yes – South has to keep the 9 of hearts and North has to pitch all his hearts, including the A. Not a likely defense but it would keep North off the endplay!

The next hand (a slightly modified version of a hand from Eric Rodwell's "The Rodwell Files") requires planning and careful use of entries to avoid having to rely on a finesse that is likely to lose based on the auction.

4)	63	
	QJ108	
	865	
	A654	
QJ54		K987
63		42
KJ74		1032
KQ9		J1073
	A102	
	AK975	
	AQ9	
	82	

South opens 1H and West doubles. South eventually ends up declarer in 4H and the KC is led. It looks like 9 tricks are easy but if the diamond finesse is off, where is the 10<sup>th</sup> trick going to come from? Is there any way we can get West to lead a diamond at some point in the hand?

First, of course, we have to strip all possible harmless exit cards from West – which means we need to ruff 2 clubs in declarer’s hand and one spade in dummy (and also pull trump and never let East get on lead to start diamonds). A tall order and we will need many dummy entries. So, we start by ducking the KC, keeping West on lead and getting ready for club ruffs.

West continues the QC and you win the A and ruff a club with your AH. A heart to dummy’s queen and a ruff of dummy’s last club with your KH finishes off the club suit. Now, a small trump to dummy’s JH pulls all the defenders’ trumps. Leading spades from dummy towards your A102 will keep East off the lead as long as he has one or less of the missing spade honors, which is reasonable based on West’s double of 1H. You lead the 3 and East plays the 9 and you play the 10 (note that if East plays the K when you lead the 3, you win the A and exit with the 10). West wins the J and plays a spade to East’s K and your Ace. At this point you cannot go down!

Why? You ruff your last spade in dummy and lead toward the AQ9 of diamonds. No defender holding in the diamond suit can stop you from getting your 10<sup>th</sup> trick if you just cover anything East plays (cover the 10 with your Q and any other card East might play with your 9). West wins the trick and has to either give you a ruff and a sluff by leading a spade or else 2 diamond tricks by leading around to your tenace in diamonds.

This hand took a lot of work but you really could have claimed at trick 1 if you knew trumps were 2 – 2 and West had at least 2 of the missing spade honors – nothing else mattered.

The next hand presents declarer with a suit holding that looks almost hopeless.

	AQ74	
5)	AQ	
	KQ	
	J7542	
96		2
J87532		964
1097		865432
K10		Q96
	KJ10853	
	K10	
	AJ	
	A83	

South arrives at 6S with all the keycards, 34 points between the two hands and a very solid 10 card trump fit. But, because of wasted values in short suits, declarer is faced with a weak club holding that could easily lose two tricks. His first thought is to hope a defender has the KQ tight of clubs or that East has a singleton club K or Q. But these are not very likely holdings. What else might work? He could play off all his spades and hope a defender with 3 clubs pitches one. But the defense, looking at this dummy, should know to hold onto clubs.

What if a defender with two clubs to an honor (a likely holding) can be thrown in after all safe exit cards are gone? That looks promising. Declarer starts by playing 2 rounds of trumps and then the AC. Next, the diamonds and hearts are cashed. Now declarer exits with a low club. With the holding shown, West will win the K and have to give declarer a ruff and a sluff. It wouldn't matter if West had the Q instead of the K, since East could not overtake without setting up dummy's J. Note that the hand still makes if West unblocks the K when the A is played as East cannot overtake the 10C without making dummy's J a winner. It also makes whenever East has a doubleton club honor.

Unblocking the K or Q would work, however, if West had the 9 or 6 instead of the 10.

Unblocking is a key defensive strategy to avoid declarer's elimination and throw-in plays. This is why declarer should play the AC early before it becomes obvious what is going to happen.

Another key defensive strategy to try to foil declarer throw-in plays is to rise as high as you can in second seat when declarer has stripped side suits and is leading towards a combination such

as AQ8 or K97. Make declarer play a high card. Don't let declarer pass the lead around to your partner for an endplay.

Also, when defending, try to look out for your partner by leading the suit declarer is hoping to force him to lead after stripping the hand of other suits. Too often, defenders passively lead something they know declarer will have to ruff – thus helping declarer eliminate exit cards instead of helping their partner. The last hand is an example of this.

6)	J1073	
	K106	
	AQ8	
	Q84	
K4		86
9842		AQJ73
973		KJ5
10653		J92
	AQ952	
	5	
	10 642	
	AK7	

East opens 1H. South overcalls 1S and North shows invitational values and South bids 4S. The opening lead is the 9 of hearts. Declarer covers with the 10 and loses to the J. East leads the 9 of clubs at trick 2. Declarer wins in dummy and finesses for the KS, losing to West. West leads another heart and declarer plays the K and ruffs East's A.

Declarer completes the elimination by leading a trump to dummy, ruffing dummy's last heart and playing the top clubs. A diamond lead now and West alertly rises with the 9 second hand but it does not help. Declarer plays the Q and East is end-played when he takes the K – any card he plays gives declarer an extra trick.

A nicely played elimination and throw-in – but could the defense have done better after the opening lead? Yes, when West won the KS he should have led the 9 of diamonds at that point. He knows declarer had only 1 heart from the bidding and all leading hearts again achieves is helping declarer strip the suit and eventually end-play partner. East's lead of a high club at trick 2 indicates his values must lie in diamonds and West has to protect his partner by leading that suit.

## Summary

### As Declarer:

1) Look for ways to make the opponents lead key suits for you instead of relying on a finesse. This usually involves

a) Looking for suit combinations it might be dangerous for you to lead but helpful if either defender (or just one particular defender) has to lead that suit.

b) Eliminating safe exit cards from the opponents hands.

c) In a suit contract, having trump in both dummy and declarer's hand so that a defender has to give up a sluff and a ruff or lead the suit you want her to lead when thrown-in.

d) If in NT, watching discards and counting hand distributions so that when you throw-in the right defender he cannot hurt you and may (or must) help you.

2) When planning endplays review opponents bidding and cards played. Decide if there is a defender you don't want on lead while you go through the "elimination" stage and do what you can to keep him from leading.

3) Carefully plan entries so that you can eliminate safe exit suits and still end up in the right hand for the "throw-in" lead. Look for "loser on loser" throw-in plays that may help by putting the lead in the right opponent's hand.

### On Defense

Defending against you or your partner being end-played is difficult. You have to

a) Recognize declarer is preparing for an end-play.

b) Unblock to avoid being thrown-in if the end-play is directed at you.

c) Lead key suits that might help avoid partner being end-played instead of just passively helping declarer strip the hand of safe exit cards.

d) In end positions, after declarer has stripped the hand of safe exits and is leading towards a combination like AQ8 or K97, make sure you play high enough in second position to stop declarer from ducking the suit into partner.