

Nurture Your Trump Tricks

By Jean Besse

Bobby Fischer once said: 'You have found a very good move. Fine! This is the time to think again: there probably exists a better one!'

Bobby, of course, was talking about chess. His advice, however, applies also to bridge and especially to the situation where a defender sees an opportunity to make an easy trump trick. Surprisingly often, it will pay him to look for better things.

Players soon learn that by not overruffing the queen when they have K-10-2 over declarer's A-Q-J-9-8-7 they can ensure two tricks. The following situation, however, is less obvious:

	♠ Q 2	
	♥ 8 6	
	♦ K J 9 5	
	♣ Q 10 9 7 6	
♠ A 9		♠ K 8 3
♥ Q 3 2		♥ 9 7
♦ Q 4 3 2		♦ A 10 7 6
♣ A K 5 4		♣ J 8 3 2
	♠ J 10 7 6 5 4	
	♥ A K J 10 5 4	
	♦ 8	
	♣ —	

The contract is four spades. South ruffs the opening club lead and sets out to establish his side suit: he takes two top hearts and ruffs a heart in dummy with the queen of spades. If East yields to the temptation of overruffing with the king, South loses only one other trump trick and makes his contract. But if East refuses to overruff, the declarer is bound to lose three trump tricks no matter how hard he tries. With a diamond loser in addition, he is defeated.

The idea of not overruffing soon becomes familiar whenever you hold either length or strength in the trump suit. Somewhat less well known are those cases where the defender with the shorter or weaker trump holding may gain a trick for his side by employing the same tactics.

	♠ 9 2	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ A K Q 4 3	
	♣ A K 5 4	
♠ Q 7		♠ K 6 5
♥ 10 7		♥ A K Q 9 8 2
♦ 10 9 8 7 2		♦ J 5
♣ J 9 6 2		♣ 10 8
	♠ A J 10 8 4 3	
	♥ J 4 3	
	♦ 6	
	♣ Q 7 3	

South plays in four spades after East has overcalled in hearts. West leads the ten of hearts and East plays off the three top cards in the suit.

If, on the third round of hearts, West jumps in with the queen of spades, declarer will discard from dummy and thereafter will have no trouble picking up East's trumps. Instead, West should rise to the occasion by discarding a diamond! After ruffing this trick in dummy South will have to lose two trump tricks – and his contract.

In that example, refusal to ruff with the queen in front of dummy's 9-2 was no more than good technique. Dare you go one step further? It is possible to blend the technique of trump promotion with deception, as in this example:

	♠ 9 2	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ A K Q 4 3	
	♣ A Q 5 4	
♠ J 7		♠ K 6 5
♥ 10 7		♥ A K J 9 8 2
♦ 10 9 8 7 2		♦ J 5
♣ J 9 6 2		♣ 10 8
	♠ A Q 10 8 4 3	
	♥ Q 4 3	
	♦ 6	
	♣ K 7 3	

Again the contract is four spades and West leads the ten of hearts, East playing off ace, king and a small one. On the third round West ruffs declarer's queen with the seven of spades!

Declarer overruffs with dummy's nine and continues with the two. When East follows with a small trump declarer is confronted with a problem. If he goes up with the ace he may lose two trump tricks to East's possible K-J-x. If he plays the queen he may lose to West's possible K-x (for with this holding West would certainly ruff low, not with the king).

Declarer may very well decide that his best chance is to play the ten, which seems to take care of both possibilities. It will be a shock to him when it loses to the now singleton jack and he has to lose to the king as well.

My BOLS bridge tip is this:

Take care of your trump tricks. When you see a chance for an easy overruff, don't be in too much of a hurry to take it. You may gain more tricks by holding back