

Ruffing In The Short Hand

There is a subtlety to getting the most tricks we can out of a trump suit. We will generally only develop *extra* tricks if we take ruffs in the hand that has fewer trumps. If we take ruffs in the LONG hand (the hand with more trumps) we will not actually add to our trick tally. Developing players will often spend a lot of effort trying to gain ruffs in their own hand. What matters is getting ruffs in dummy. This is a complicated topic, so it is best to look at two hands in isolation:

Ruffing In The Long Hand

Suppose we open One Spade on the following South cards. North bids Three Spades (8 HCP plus 3 points for a singleton equals 11 TPs). South then accepts this invitation and bids game. West leads the Ace and then the King of Clubs.

♠ A98
♥ A5432
♦ 7
♣ T984

♠ KQJ542
♥ J6
♦ AT76
♣ 7

Suppose South ruffs the King of Clubs and plays two rounds of trumps (the opponents having two each) They then ruff a third club, play a Heart to the Ace and ruff a fourth club. They might now try to play the Ace of Diamonds and ruff a Diamond, but they are out of trumps now! They'll get the Ace of Hearts and nothing else out of the remaining cards. Their final tally will be Seven Spade Tricks (ruffing three Clubs and one Diamond), One Heart Trick, One Diamond Trick and no Club tricks – nine in total and one off.

Ruffing In The Short Hand

Now suppose that at the next table, the Auction was identical: 1S:3S:4S. West also led the Ace and the King of Clubs (ruffed by South) but South now Cashed the Ace of Diamonds and ruffed a Diamond. They then ruffed a Club and ruffed a second Diamond. One more club ruff and they ruffed their final Diamond (with the Ace of Trumps!) They then cashed the Ace of Hearts and waited to get their King-Queen-Jack of Spades. Compare their tally to the table before (who made nine). We have scored Three Diamond ruffs in Dummy, three club ruffs in the South hand, Three Trump tricks by length (the KQJ). They also score both the Ace of Hearts and the Ace of Diamonds. Instead of making nine tricks, they have made eleven!

♠ A98
♥ A5432
♦ 7
♣ T984

♠ KQJ542
♥ J6
♦ AT76
♣ 7

What Went Wrong?

The problem for our first declarer is that they ruffed in their long hand (with trumps that were **already going to become tricks**). The second declarer won all of those tricks as well, but made sure to ruff THREE diamonds in dummy, not just the one diamond at the end.

When playing with a trump suit, you should draw trumps....UNLESS you need to do something with Dummy's short trumps first!