

End Plays – Part I



Improve Your Declarer Play

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Expert players often execute endplays as they occur more frequently than squeezes. Endplays are typically much better than a finesse. The first step is to recognize the possibility early in the play. Let's explore six hand types where you are declarer as South. Try looking at only the North and South cards, planning your play.

Basic Elimination

Let's start with a simple endplay.

	North	
	♠KQ72	
	♥KQ985	
	♦762	
	♣7	
West		East
♠65		♠J1084
♥J3		♥4
♦KQ53		♦984
♣Q10853		♣KJ962
	South	
	♠A93	
	♥A10762	
	♦AJ10	
	♣A4	

West leads ♣5 against your 6♥. To avoid two diamond losers if spades are not 3-3, you pull trump, play three spades ending in dummy. After a spade ruff, a club ruff eliminates the black suits. Now you lead a diamond to the 10. West must either return a diamond or play a club for a ruff and sluff. If West held four spades, that suit was also eliminated.

Notrump

Notrump endplays are less frequent as they lack the threat of a ruff and sluff.

	North	
	♠KQ2	
	♥Q76	
	♦AK73	
	♣1054	
West		East

♠J5	♠10964
♥1092	♥J853
♦102	♦J9654
♣KJ9876	♣

South
 ♠A873
 ♥AK4
 ♦Q8
 ♣AQ32

West leads the ♥10 against 6N. Declarer can make if spades break, but it's good to have a backup plan. After three rounds of spades, hearts and diamonds ending in dummy, West is known to have five or six clubs. If West has only five clubs including the K and the last heart, the contract is doomed. When you lead the club, East shows out and you play the Q. On the club return you win the last two tricks.

Partial Elimination

On some hands you have play if you find the right distribution.

	North	
	♠654	
	♥AKJ	
	♦10642	
	♣A52	
West		East
♠KQJ		♠9872
♥94		♥1086
♦Q95		♦K87
♣Q10873		♣J96

South
 ♠A103
 ♥Q7532
 ♦AJ3
 ♣K4

How will you make 4♥ on the lead of the ♠K with four apparent losers? Some diamond layouts will produce two tricks, but that's a long shot. You don't benefit from eliminating clubs and pulling three rounds of trump. But if you play only two rounds of trump, clear clubs and exit with a spade, West will cash a second spade. Lacking the last trump, West must exit with a diamond. You cover a diamond honor with the A, pull the last trump and knock out the remaining diamond.

Loser on Loser

Here's loser on loser endplay variation.

North
 ♠K2
 ♥8654

	♦AK98	
	♣843	
West		East
♠8754		♠QJ106
♥AKJ10		♥973
♦73		♦54
♣KJ5		♣10976
	South	
	♠A93	
	♥Q2	
	♦QJ1062	
	♣AQ2	

You compete to 4♦ over 3♠, avoiding 3N. West leads A, K and J of hearts which you ruff. You draw trump in two rounds and eliminate spades. Now you lead of the fourth heart and pitch the ♣2 from your hand (loser on loser). West must play a club or give you a ruff and sluff.

These are just a few examples. Recognizing and executing the various elements of endplays will improve your declarer play. Be sure to warn all your partners that you will make seemingly unmakeable contracts. We will explore more endplays next month. ♣