

Rick's Tricks

LOSE 'EM EARLY!

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When loss of a trick is inevitable, declarer's best practice is generally to lose the trick as soon as possible. The reasoning is that the opponents will know less about the hand and, thus, are less likely to come up with the most damaging response.

Two common situations where this philosophy is particularly useful:

When you wish to lose a trick to rectify the count for a potential squeeze.

In a No Trump contract when one of your suits is lacking the Ace.

However, I had two matchpoint hands come up on back-to-back days that fall in a third category. In both cases, I was playing in 4 of major where I had a suit side where both dummy and my hand each held 3 cards in the same side suit. Let's take a look:

DUMMY:

♠Axxx ♥AK10x ♦Ax ♣A10x

MY HAND:

♠KQ10x ♥QJxx ♦Qx ♣9xx

The auction is simple: Pard opens 1♣, I bid 1♥ and he raises to 4♥.

I get the ♠7 lead. I happily gobble up the 10 and then pull trumps in 3 rounds, ending in my hand.

I have to lose some club tricks so let's start losing them now. I play a club to the 10 and RHO wins the Queen. Back comes a spade and my hopes for an 11th trick are still alive. I rattle off my remaining two spade winners and cash an extra round of trump just to see if there were any lurkers. You never know! At trick 9, my RHO hesitates a bit before releasing a club. I play ♣A and a club to righty's King. He holds the ♦K, so my RHO is endplayed at trick 12. Clearly, the defense could have gone better but conceding a club trick early increased the chances they would go err. RHO had no idea who held the key ♣J when their ♣Q was a winner at trick 4. Bridge can be a very mean game. You want to give the opponents as many chances to go down the rabbit hole as possible.

Next case to try to get to 11 in matchpoints:

DUMMY:

♠QJ10xx ♥Ax ♦762 ♣AKx

MY HAND:

♠AK9xx ♥Kxx ♦J84 ♣xx

The opponents were silent during a simple Jacoby 2NT auction. 1♠ by me, 2NT by Pard and a 4♠ signoff by yours truly. A heart lead is won in dummy by the Ace. Again, 10 are a lock and we are *California Dreamin'* of 11. I pull trumps in two rounds ending in dummy. The technically correct line is to strip clubs and hearts, then leading a diamond. For example, this would work if one of the opponents held a doubleton diamond with two high honors. You would either be the beneficiary of a ruff/sluff after winning the 2nd round of diamonds OR your Jack would grow up if the opponents attempted to unblock. Alas, that seems like a small chance. Can we do better in practice?

I decided to play a diamond from dummy. Low on my right. I am not sure whether playing the 8 or the Jack gives me the best chance to pull off a deception. Perhaps the Jack is best since playing such a low spot looks so suspicious. However, I play the 8, lefty winning their 10. Back comes a heart.

I proceed to strip the hand of my clubs and hearts ending in dummy. Only now do I play a 2nd round of diamonds from dummy. RHO hitches then plays low. LHO wins the Ace. Lefty's subsequent tank is thrilling. Back comes another heart. I do get my ruff/sluff and my 11th trick. LHO, a quality player, did start with ♦A10 doubleton. Righty, not as strong a player, probably should have played the ♦Q when I played the first round of diamonds from dummy, holding ♦KQ9xx. Let's assume he splits his honors and does win the Queen. My deception still has a strong chance of success. Lefty must play the 10. For the opponents to get their 3 tricks, RHO must immediately continue with a low diamond. This appears to be the strongest defense but defenders often do not immediately play back the suit declarer attacks. In practice, righty will often play back a heart and I will get my 11th trick.

Let's consider LHO's defense. Maybe RHO made a genius play by ducking the first round of diamonds! Upon winning the 10, should LHO immediately cash the ♦A? Probably. She knows the opponents have 10 trumps and, thus, plenty of ammo to execute a "strip and throw in" later in the hand. But, she did not. "The Fog of War" is much thicker in the early tricks of the play.

The previous two hands are examples as to why matchpoints is so much more challenging than IMPs. In IMPs, these hands have one measly IMP on the line.

Believe it or not, Muhammad Ali had the potential to be a fine bridge player. In one of his most famous fights, the "Rumble In The Jungle", he travelled to Zaire to take on the seemingly invincible George Foreman. In the early rounds, the legendary champ passively stayed on the ropes, allowing the huge Foreman to punch himself into exhaustion. Finally, the champ took over and triumphed in later rounds. Muhammad Ali sensed the potential benefits of losing early. If you

successfully employ the same strategy in a bridge setting, please do not gloat and use the champ's lexicon of "Rope A Dope"! In boxing, Zero Tolerance is not only permitted but encouraged. ♣