

Rick's Tricks

PLEASE RUFF IN!

By Rick Roeder

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When we had our bridge training wheels, a basic rule is rapidly learned when declaring trump contracts: Pull as many of your opponent's trumps as quickly and as reasonably as one can. Few elements of our great game are more frustrating than for a declarer than to have a contract scuttled when the bad guys score a ruff or two.

I was playing a hand in the 2022 Australian National Teams where I wished I never had such fear. Let's take a look:

I was playing 4♠ on a trump lead:

DUMMY	ME
♠9654	♠AKQ2
♥75	♥AQ10843
♦K87	♦Q62
♣J954	♣void

At all white, the auction was as follows:

LHO	PARD	RHO	ME
P	P	P	1♥
2♦	P	P	2♠
P	3♠	P	4♠

(all pass)

Plan your play after a trump lead (If you insert the 9 it will be covered by the 10).

I thought there was a reasonable chance the ♥K was on my left. I played two rounds of trumps, both following, then played Ace and a Heart. LHO followed up the line as RHO won the Jack.

A low Club came back and I was in a big spot of boo hoo or as Miss Toni Fisher once sang, "*The Big Hurt*." If I do not ruff immediately, an ongoing Club attack will continue. Let's assume I do ruff immediately, which results in this position at trick 6:

DUMMY	ME
♠65	♠Q
♥void	♥Q1084
♦K87	♦Q62

♣J98

♣void

If I ruff my Hearts good and draw the last trump, I stand to lose the last 3 tricks as I marooned with ♦Q62 in my hand at trick 11. At such point, a Diamond to the King is a futile endeavor as LHO will pop the Ace. Two Club winners would seal my doom.

If a Diamond ruff was available to the opponents, I should have encouraged them to take it. If Diamonds were divided 6-1, the likelihood that the hand with the stiff Diamond had at least 3 trumps was high. If Spades were divided 4-1, getting to 10 tricks would usually be a bridge too high. I would be quite happy if the only tricks I lost proved to be the ♦Ace, a Diamond ruff and a Heart. If Diamonds were divided 5-2, as was the case here, a trick 2 play of the Diamond to the King (presumably winning) could not hurt as I can keep my RHO off lead in the early stages of the hand.

Imagine my ecstasy if dummy's ♦K lives at trick 2 and I follow up playing a Heart to my 10 at trick 3, winning! I play a 2nd round of trumps followed by the ♥A at trick 5. I am further jazzed when both follow as Motown's "*Dancing In The Streets*" would have happily been blaring in my head. I proceed to ruff a Heart in dummy as the 2♦ overcaller helplessly discards. I triumphantly play dummy's last trump and am delighted to concede two Diamond losers at the end. 11 tricks.

LHO's hand:

♠xx ♥9x ♦A10953 ♣AQ83

I underplayed this hand by two tricks. My ex-partners will think, "Roeder only underplayed by two tricks? He's improving!"

This hand that I destroyed is an example of the exception proving the rule. My thinking should have been Ruff in! Ruff in! Ruff in! if you must. Sadly, at the end of this butchered hand, I could only think of another Motown performer, Jimmy Ruffin. Ruffin's classic hit was "*What Becomes of the Broken Hearted.*" Tragically, I could relate. ♣