



Issue 6: 2006 BridgeHands Newsletter

Trumps Are Wild, Part 2

June-July 2006

Dear Bridge Friends,

Welcome to ***Bridgehands*** eMag Newsletter, issue 6. In this issue, we will complete our saga of Marty Bergen's "Trumps are Wild" from his [Points Schmoints](#) book (nominated "book of the year" by the [ABTA](#) - American Bridge Teachers' Association). You may call Marty directly at 800 386-7432 or send EMAIL to him at mbergen@mindspring.com to place your order for this and other books. Mention Coupon Code **BHB1** when you order any hardbound book and you will receive two free softbound books!

Next up, the Rule of 3. Working through the numbers, we will learn how the Rule of 3 gives us a helpful guideline to consider when competing to win the auction.

Perhaps you have heard the axiom, "Play low in the second seat, play high in the third seat." Another Rule of 3? (3rd seat) Let's see where this axiom works and doesn't . . .

Note: Viewing the hands below requires your EMAIL reader to use "fixed fonts" (not proportional). If you have problems reading this document, please view our [online web-based copy](#) or [Adobe Acrobat PDF file](#) suitable for printing.

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Trumps Are Wild! Part 2

Point Schmoints, by Marty Bergen (copyrighted)
Trumps Are Wild, Part 2

Maneuvering Trump Entries Like a Virtuoso

Drawing trumps with a long, solid suit is not difficult, but neither should it be considered routine. By exercising a bit of care and effort, you can maintain great flexibility while pulling trumps:

North

Q J 5 3

South

A K 10 8 6 2

Assume that, as expected, trumps divide 2–1. If you play the **A-K** while following low from dummy, you will find yourself with:

North

Q J

South

10 8 6 2

Very inflexible; there are no entries to the South hand. If, instead, you cash the **Q-J** while following low from your hand, the result will be:

North

5 3

South

A K 10 8

Equally inflexible; now you cannot enter the North hand.

Start again. Take the ace and lead the six to the queen (among other equivalent solutions). You have preserved:

North

J 5

South

K 10 8 2

You now have two entries to each hand.

You lose nothing with this approach, and you will be a hero if you need the entries later.

On the following deal, declarer did not appreciate dummy's two entries, and paid the price.

North

S 8 7 5 4

H 10 8 6

D 9 6 5

C 7 5 4

West

S 10 3

H 3

D K Q J 8 3

C J 9 6 3 2

East

S K 9 6 2

H A 5 4

D A 7 4 2

C Q 10

South

S A Q J

H K Q J 9 7 2

D 10

C A K 8

West

—

3D*

All Pass

North

—

P

East

1D

P

South

Double

4H

* Weak jump raise.

West led the **DK** and continued with the queen. Declarer ruffed with the **H2**, but he could no longer make the hand. When he continued with the **HK**, East knew enough to duck; what was his hurry? It was now impossible for declarer to enter dummy more than once, and one successful spade finesse was not enough. Declarer eventually lost a spade trick for down one.

Declarer was unlucky to be playing against a capable defender, but good players make their own luck. If South had ruffed with an honor instead of the deuce at trick two, he could have forced two entries to dummy, as follows. Lead the **H2** to dummy's **six**. If East wins his ace, the trump position would be:

North		
H 10 8		
West		East
H —		H 5 4
South		
H K Q 9 7		

Once declarer is careful to trump East's diamond return with a second honor, he is in control. Trumping with honors is not showing off; sometimes it is the only way to preserve entries. After South ruffs high, he leads the 7 to the 8 and takes the spade finesse. When that wins, repeat the maneuver; 9 to the 10 for a second spade finesse.

It would not have helped East to duck dummy's 6 on the first round of trumps. Now the lead would be in dummy, allowing an immediate spade finesse. The position would then be:

North		
H 10 8		
West		East
H —		H A 4
South		
H K Q 9 7		

This position is virtually the same as above, except for East's **ace**. Again, no problem: **H7** to the **8** and East's **ace**; trump the **diamond high**; and lead the **H9** to dummy's **10** for the second spade finesse.

It is Not Illegal to Count Winners in a Suit Contract

You've heard it a thousand times: "In notrump, count winners; in suit contracts, count losers." Or, as I like to remind my students, use the consonants in "win" and "lose" as a memory aid — Winners in Notrump, Losers in Suit contracts.

However, sometimes it is easier and more helpful to count winners in a suit contract. This is especially true when

- a) the contract is a part-score or slam;
- b) the trump suit is shaky; or
- c) the hand involves a crossruff.

South could count to ten on this hand.

				North							
				S	A	K	Q				
				H	7	5	4				
				D	6	4	3				
				C	8	5	3	2			
West					East						
S	J	9	8	3	S	10					
H	Q	J	10	3	H	9	8	2			
D	Q 8				D	J	10	9	2		
C	Q	10	6		C	K	J	9	7	4	
				South							
				S	7	6	5	4	2		
				H	A	K	6				
				D	A	K	7	5			
				C	A						
				West	North	East	South				
				P	P	P	1S				
				P	2S	P	4S				
				All Pass							

Declarer counted eight winners: **HA-K, DA-K, CA** and **SA-K-Q**. If spades divided 3–2, declarer's last two trumps would be good. However, good players prefer good technique to good splits and good luck.

After winning the heart lead, South took his **CA**. Next, he cashed the **SA-K**. Bad split. No problem! He ruffed a club, and led a third trump. A second club ruff provided declarer's seventh trick. **DA-K, HK** and on to the next hand.

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Rule of 3, Part 1

Having previously covered the [Rule of 1](#) and [Rule of 2](#), let's continue our progression to the [Rule of 3](#). First off, we should profess that like the Rule of 1 and 2, this tip is more of a guideline. The Rule of 3 states:

In a competitive auction, often it is best to stop bidding at the 2 level unless your side has 9+ trumps or a double fit.

Since both sides are bidding competitively, the Rule of 3 assumes both partnerships have roughly the same aggregate strength (18-22 High Card Points). Thus, aside from environmental factors, either side has a good chance to win 8 tricks and make their 2 level contract. However, since neither side has a preponderance of power, the likelihood of making a 3 level contract drops considerably.

So what do we do when the opponents make a two level major suit bid, perhaps 2 Spades, where we want to compete? According to the Rule of 3, we should have a superior fit, defined as:

**A 9+ card trump suit fit between the two hands, or
A two-suited hand with a fit in partner's secondary suit (double fit)**

This approach certainly makes sense, since the side that pushes beyond the 2 level is making a commitment not to lose more than 4 tricks [$13 - (6+3) = 4$]. As we would expect, the certainty of making a 3 level contract increases appreciably with an extra strong fit in one or two suits. Some advanced players consider "[The Law of Total Tricks](#)" and "[Losing Trick Count](#)" for sophisticated hand evaluation. However, aside from the mathematics of those approaches, their precepts conform to our Rule of 3.

Incidentally, a corollary to the Rule of 3 states:

"The odd (bidding) level belongs to the opponents."

This tracks well with our Rule of 3 – compete with the opponents at the 2 level but use caution at the 3 level. And when both sides have a very strong fit, consider competing at the 4 level but not the 5 level (odd level contracts belong to the opponents). Of course, if it's clear the opponents' bidding is obstructive (perhaps sacrifice bidding), do not let them push you to an unmakeable contract. If appropriate, increase the opponents' penalty by doubling their contract. Conversely, when the opponents bid 3 Hearts based on

strength and your side overcalls 3 Spades based on length (and perhaps vulnerability), be aware you are tempting opponents to bid game. If the opponents bid game, are you prepared to double their game contract? Probably not if your hand is primarily offensively oriented - honors in your long suit that are likely to soon be trumped by opponents. Here again, be careful before making a 3 level bid over the opponents.

Always play third Hand High? (Rule of 3, Part 2)

In Bridge, there is an axiom that goes, "play low in the second seat – play high in the third seat." After an opening lead, the player in the second seat is in a prime position to become finessed. By playing low in the second seat, the partner of the leader (in the third seat) cannot be certain whether the player in the second or fourth seat holds a crucial honor or intermediate card; these cards may eventually be promoted to win a critical trick. However, in third seat, either our partner deliberately lead the suit or we called for the dummy card as declarer. Either way, in third seat our predominant goal is to promote a trick. So we generally play a high card in third seat.

Yet like most "rules", there are several considerations before automatically playing a high card in third seat:

1. Play the "lowest of equals" over dummy cards – playing the higher of two touching honors misleads partner into thinking the Declarer holds the lower of a touching sequence.
2. When appropriate, keep a "cover card" (usually higher honor card) over the visible card in dummy – of course, the defender must carefully consider factors such as transportation, possible finesses, declarer's short suits, etc.
3. Avoid winning a trick when gaining the lead at that moment would ultimately lead to losing additional tricks.
4. Consider keeping suit communications open in Notrump contract – playing low on the first round (ducking) to subsequently promote the suit when regaining the lead.

Let's look at some illustrative examples – this discussion assumes fourth-best leads.

4 3 2

A 10 9 8 7	K J 5
Q 6	

West leads the **10**, the top of a sequence. East must go up with the **King**, otherwise declarer South will win the trick and switch to another suit.

K 9 7	
A 8 3 2	Q 10 4
J 6 5	

West leads the **2**, the fourth best and promising a four card suit (otherwise West would lead a higher card, holding 5). After declarer plays the **7** from dummy, East must play **Queen**, otherwise South unnecessarily wins a cheap trick.

8 7 6	
K 10 4 3	Q 9 2
A J 5	

West leads the **3**, the fourth best - as East, you can deduce this fact since you hold the **2**; if West held 5+ cards, the lead would have been a card above the **3**. In third seat, East must play the **Queen**, again third hand high in order to hold the declarer to one winner.

Now let's look at a few hands involving dummy finesses.

Q 8	
A 7 6 5 4 3	K 10 9
J 2	

West leads the **5** to dummy's **8**. East must play the **King** – third hand high. Incidentally, did you use the [Rule of 11](#) here? Here the formula is: $11 - 5 = 6$

So after the lead of the **5**, the remaining 3 hands have 5 cards above the **5**. Sitting in the East seat, we can count 5 of the 6 so

declarer South has only one card above the leader's **5**. Playing the **King** ensures the defenders get all their tricks. Now let's modify the hand slightly.

	Q 8 2	
A 7 6 5 4		K J 9
	10 3	

After West's lead of the **5** to dummy's **8**, East must play the Jack, not the King. This is an example of "low from equals" – since the dummy's **Queen** is pinned, playing the **Jack** will win a trick just as effectively as the **King** and still keep the looming honor over the **Queen** later in the hand. It would be wasteful to play the **King** on the first trick and potentially give the opponents an undeserved trick later in the hand.

	Q 8 7	
9 2		A J 10 6 5
	K 4 3	

During the auction East bids a long suit, so West leads the **9** – probably from a doubleton. East may play a low card since the only outstanding honor above the leader's **9** is the Ace. Here's an exception to playing third hand high. East should keep a "cover card" – the **Ace** honor over dummy's **Queen**. In addition to keeping the important cover card, West can deduce that East has the **Jack and 10**. Now let's investigate third hand play when leader has a strong honor sequence.

	J 3 2	
K Q 10 5 4		A 6
	9 8 7	

West leads the **King**, the top of a broken sequence (recall we should lead the top of the touching honors). In third seat, East should play the **Ace** and return the suit. If East played the **6**, West will certainly play again; this would force East to play the **Ace**, blocking the suit – a most unfortunate situation. Next, let's examine a situation where third hand uses a ducking strategy to belatedly promote a suit (opponents are playing a Notrump contract).

3 2

10 4

A K Q 6 5

J 9 8 7

Imagine East bid this suit, South overcalled Notrump and the opponents eventually ended up in 3 Notrump. After West dutifully leads the **10**, should East win the trick and continue playing the suit? The answer is, "it depends!" If East has an outside entry, then going up with the top honor will work – East loses the fourth trick to South's **Jack** but later wins a trick in an outside suit and cashes the fourth trick in this suit to set the contract. But what about the situation where West has the only winner in an outside suit? If East were to win the **Ace-King-Queen** and East later gets in the lead, West would not be able to return a card to East's promoted suit. We call this keeping the suit communication open. In essence, when the long hand does not have an outside entry, be careful to disrupt the vital suit communication channel. Finally, let's explore a ducking maneuver where the opponents are in a suit contract and partner is hoping to gain a ruff.

J 8 6

9 2

A 10 7 5 4

K Q 3

West leads the **9**; should East play third hand high with the **Ace**? Again, the answer depends on who has an outside suit entry. If East has an outside **Ace** of trump, it would be okay to win the **Ace** here and return a low card in the suit – when the declarer wins the trick and plays a trump, East wins and plays a third card in this suit to give West a **ruff**. However, if West potentially held the **Ace** of trump or **King-third** "behind" the declarer, then clearly East should not win the first trick. As we saw before, when West regains the lead and returns the remaining singleton in the opening suit, East wins the **Ace** and gives West a well-deserved trump ruff.

In summary, third hand high is a useful axiom yet it does not absolve the player from thoughtful play based on the big picture - and that's what makes our delightful game of Bridge so much fun! Two good books covering third hand high (or not) are: "[Defense](#)" (formerly known as the Heart Series) and "[25 Bridge Myths Exposed.](#)"

BridgeHands Back Issues

If you missed a back issue of a ***BridgeHands*** Newcomer-Novice eMag newsletters, here are the links:

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[Issue 1 - Promotions](#)

[Issue 2 - Notrump Leads](#)

[Issue 3 - Leads Against Suit Contract](#)

[Issue 4 - Trump Power](#)

[Issue 5 - Trumps are wild - Part 1](#)

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