

## Fast and Slow Losers

(Friday mini-lesson – 15 November 2019)

Today I'd like to talk about fast and slow losers, timing and entries.

When we are declarer, we've all learned the importance of counting our losers in a suit contract. *Equally* important is determining whether those losers are fast losers or slow losers. This knowledge can affect your choice of which suit to play first.

As a first example, you, as South, end up as declarer in a contract of 4♠ on the deal shown below:

	♠ 9 7 4 2	
	♥ K 5 3	
	♦ Q J 6	
	♣ J 7 4	
♠ A K		♠ 6
♥ Q J T 8		♥ 9 7 2
♦ 9 7 4 2		♦ A T 8 5
♣ 9 8 5	♠ Q J T 8 5 3	♣ Q T 6 3 2
	♥ A 6 4	
	♦ K 3	
	♣ A K	

What is your plan to make this contract after West leads the Q♥? Counting losers, you see you have four – two ♠s, one ♥, one ♦. One too many.

The defenders can cash their ♠ A K and the A♦ whenever they get the lead, so these are called **fast** losers. The ♥ loser, however, is **slow** for the moment, *but slow losers can become fast losers* once declarer's winners in the suit are gone. West's lead has made your slow ♥ loser only one loss of the lead away from becoming a fast loser. This one loser must be eliminated before this happens.

Notice the lopsided ♦ suit with dummy having three cards while declare has two. So, we can drive out the A♦ to promote two ♦ tricks. Then a loser can be discarded on dummy's third ♦, and that discard obviously must be a ♥ loser, since the other three are unavoidable.

If we play *even one trump* before driving out the A♦, the opponents get in to continue leading ♥s, making our loser in that suit **fast** - that is, the defenders can cash a ♥ whenever East wins the A♦.

Thus, **our plan** must be to win the opening lead in hand, saving our K♥ as a later entry to dummy, and lead the K♦ immediately. If the opponents duck the first ♦ lead, then lead another ♦. The defenders can take their ace and when they lead another ♥, your king in dummy allows you the critical

entry to cash the third  $\diamond$  and pitch your  $\heartsuit$  loser. Now you can lead trumps and claim.

In our second example, you are declarer in a contract of  $3\spadesuit$ , after West leads the  $Q\diamond$  on the deal shown below:

	$\spadesuit$ Q 8 6 5	
	$\heartsuit$ Q 6 5	
	$\diamond$ A K 5 2	
$\spadesuit$ A 2	$\clubsuit$ 6 3	$\spadesuit$ 9 4
$\heartsuit$ K 9 8 2		$\heartsuit$ T 7 4 3
$\diamond$ Q J T 9		$\diamond$ 6 4
$\clubsuit$ 9 7 4	$\spadesuit$ K J T 7 3	$\clubsuit$ A K 8 5 2
	$\heartsuit$ A J	
	$\diamond$ 8 7 3	
	$\clubsuit$ Q J T	

What is your plan? You can count three fast losers – the top trump and two high  $\clubsuit$ s – and two slow losers – one in each of the red suits.

Again, one of these losers must be eliminated. We can't do anything about the black suit losers. For the  $\heartsuit$  loser, we might consider taking the  $\heartsuit$  finesse – in theory a 50% chance of eliminating that loser. For the  $\diamond$  loser, we might notice the  $Q\heartsuit$  in dummy, and say to ourselves – no problem, even if the  $\heartsuit$  finesse loses, the  $Q\diamond$  in dummy will then be good and can be used to pitch the  $\diamond$  loser from our hand.

Is there a problem with this plan? Yes, indeed. We won't be able to get the *timing and entries working successfully* to implement that plan.

If we finesse in  $\heartsuit$ s and lose to West, we must still unblock the  $A\heartsuit$  from our hand before we can discard on dummy's  $Q\heartsuit$ . But by that time the defenders will have knocked out *both* our top  $\diamond$ s from dummy and we have no other entry to get there.

Can you see the solution?

Scorn the  $\heartsuit$  finesse! Immediately, after winning the opening lead with the  $A\diamond$  in dummy, lead a  $\heartsuit$  to the ace in your hand, then lead the  $J\heartsuit$  back, not caring which opponent wins. The defenders can win this trick, but now you still have the  $K\diamond$  in dummy to reach your now good  $Q\heartsuit$  to discard your  $\diamond$  loser from hand.

**Summary:** Making a contract often requires us to work to set up winners in dummy to provide a place to discard losers. When doing this work, we have to **consider fast and slow losers, entries and timing**.