

COUNTING LOSERS II

	♠ 43	
	♥ AK43	
	♦ J98765	
	♣ 4	
♠ Q98		♠ J1075
♥ J8		♥ Q107
♦ AK2		♦ 103
♣ KJ976		♣ Q1085
	♠ AK62	
	♥ 9652	
	♦ Q4	
	♣ A32	

South is in 4H. West leads the DA and then switches to the HJ. What is the best general plan?

When you have 4 or more trumps in both hands, you can count losers from either hand.

Usually the hand with the most points is the easiest way to visualise things. If I can't visualise the general plan from my hand in these situations, I mentally go across to dummy and count losers from there.

South's thinking on this hand was quite illuminating. She counted losers from her own hand (2 spades, 1 heart with a good break, 2 diamonds, and 2 clubs). With 7 losers, she decided the only hope was to try to ruff 3 losers in dummy. This clearly isn't going to work because she needed to get 4 losers away and she will have to ruff with the trump K and expose another trump loser.

This is actually a set up the long suit (diamonds) in dummy hand. If you can set the suit up by now knocking out the DK, you have 4 good diamonds to throw losers away on. However, many people find this hard to visualise from the South hand.

Let's visualise losers from the North hand (no spades, no clubs, 1 heart loser with a good trump break, and a lot of diamond losers – at least DAK). Now you immediately realised the general plan – you have to set up the diamond suit and only lose the DAK.

How we set up the diamond suit though is a little tricky. Do we cash the HK first, or play diamonds straight away? There is a very good bridge maxim, "Set your suit up before you draw trumps". Sometimes, you have so many trumps you can afford to draw trumps and then set a suit up. But the maxim is often right.

On this hand, I would play to the DQ straight away. As you can see, West can give East a diamond ruff now. However, East is ruffing with a natural trump trick. Trumps can now be completely drawn with HK and the diamonds run for no further losers. It often happens that the defender who can ruff in has to do it with a natural trump trick.

There is no danger today with playing HK before setting up diamonds. Both trumps and diamonds are breaking benignly and you can play to the DQ next and later get back to dummy and run diamonds. East gets the HQ at some stage, but that is all.

However, if diamonds break badly, the HK is a needed entry to try to continue to set them up. If trumps break badly, the HK is a necessary block to stop the opponents from drawing all of your trumps.

Hence, setting up the suit first gives you some protection against bad breaks. However, the possible downside is that there could be a diamond ruff by the hand with only 2 trumps so you end up with 2 trump losers and the DAK losers and go one down on a benign break.