

DEFENCE 22 – RUFFING PARTNER’S WINNERS

I’m not talking about something so clumsy as ruffing partner’s ace away. But where declarer is working on a suit in which you have shortage and suspect partner has winners:

Be wary of ruffing small cards in a suit declarer is setting up, especially if you are doing so with the master trump or a clear trump trick.

	♠ A1042 ♥ AQ63 ♦ Q ♣ 9873		
♠ Q973 ♥ 7 ♦ KJ853 ♣ KQ5	♠ K ♥ J842 ♦ A74 ♣ AJ1042	♠ J865 ♥ K1095 ♦ 10962 ♣ 6	

S	W	N	E
1♣ (3+)	1♦	X (both majors)	2♦
2♥	P	4♥	P
P	P		

4♥ by South. West leads ♦5 (♠3 was probably better – you don’t want to lead a club from that holding into the bidder. The singleton trump could destroy partner’s holding. Deciding between a diamond and a spade: in general, it’s safer to lead away from a suit with one honour than a suit with 2 broken honours (ie non-touching honours), and safer to lead way from a queen than a king).

Unless the defence assist, South is in a fair amount of trouble – there’s 2 club losers and 2 trump losers.

South won ♦Q, led to the ♠K and then to the ♥Q and East’s ♥K. East returned ♣6 to West’s ♣Q and West wriggled off lead with a spade to the ♠A. South played to ♥J (getting the bad news in trumps) and back to the ♥A giving this picture:

	♠ 104	
	♥ 6	
	♦	
	♣ 987	
♠ Q9		♠ J8
♥		♥ 10
♦ KJ		♦ 1096
♣ K5		♣
	♠	
	♥ 8	
	♦ A7	
	♣ AJ10	

Declarer led the ♣7 of the table and East ruffed. Now declarer can win the return, drop the ♣K with the ♣A and make their contract.

East should of course just discard on the ♣7. West will get the ♣K and East will later get the master trump to put the contract one down.

It's fairly easy to see with the master trump that you can take the trick at any time and should wait until the optimum moment. However, imagine if East only has a small trump left. Again, ruffing in denies partner a club trick and allows the contract to make. Ducking and letting partner win the ♣K allows partner to give you a club ruff.