

Declarer Play Problems - 4

Thursday mini-lesson – July 2026

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Eliminating Losers

- Continuing our series on declarer play problems, let's examine a few more hands
- Two of the techniques for eliminating losers when playing a trump contract that we are all familiar with are:
 1. *Ruffing* a loser in the *shorter*-trump hand (usually dummy)
 2. *Discarding* a loser in the *longer*-trump hand (usually declarer) on a winner in the other hand

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Eliminating Losers

- What about discarding a loser in the shorter-trump hand?
- Well, that can work if we *combine* the two techniques above
- Let's look at an example

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Problem 1

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠A65	♠KQJT9
	♥43	♥AKQ
	♦AK7	♦643
	♣76432	♣AK

- You are East and, since your partner and you got *very* excited with the above two hands, you've now ended up in a contract of 7♠
- South leads the Q♦; plan the play

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.

West	East
♠ A65	♠ KQJT9
♥ 43	♥ AKQ
♦ AK7	♦ 643
♣ 76432	♣ AK

- Your *loser* count shows there is one ♦ loser
- Often in a slam it pays to count winners as well, and here you can count 12 – five ♠s, three ♥s, two ♦s, and two ♣s
- So you have work to do. How can you eliminate one loser (or gain one winner)?

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.

West	East
♠ A65	♠ KQJT9
♥ 43	♥ AKQ
♦ AK7	♦ 643
♣ 76432	♣ AK

- You have three winning ♥s in your hand and only two ♥s in dummy
- We can make use of this by pitching one ♦ from dummy. But pitching a loser from the short-trump hand is only the first stage of a *two-step process*
- The second stage is using that newly created ♦ shortage to trump our ♦ loser in dummy
- And you should be careful to ruff *high* if you can afford to do so – as you can here

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Problem 1 – cont.

- 1.
- | West | East |
|--------|--------|
| ♠A65 | ♠KQJT9 |
| ♥43 | ♥AKQ |
| ♦AK7 | ♦643 |
| ♣76432 | ♣AK |
- So, win trick one with dummy's K♦, draw just two rounds of trump with honours from your own hand, play off the A♦, then take those three ♥ tricks
 - On the third round of ♥s discard dummy's last ♦
 - Next, ruff your last ♦ with dummy's A♠, return to your hand with a ♣, remove the remaining trump and claim

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Problem 2

- 2.
- | West | East |
|-------|--------|
| ♠7532 | ♠QJT98 |
| ♥K3 | ♥AQ2 |
| ♦765 | ♦A42 |
| ♣AK83 | ♣64 |
- After you as East deal and open 1♠, partner makes a limit (invitational) raise of 3♠
 - Feeling optimistic, you carry on to game – a border-line decision, but here you have quite a nice dummy. South leads the K♦. Plan the play.

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7532	♠QJT98
	♥K3	♥AQ2
	♦765	♦A42
	♣AK83	♣64

- First count your losers; you should see four – two ♠s and two ♦s
- Where can we eliminate one of these?
- If you win the first trick and start to draw trump, an opponent will win with the ace or king and then they can cash their two ♦ tricks and sit back and wait for another high trump to set you

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7532	♠QJT98
	♥K3	♥AQ2
	♦765	♦A42
	♣AK83	♣64

- Your plan to eliminate a loser should be to, before drawing trumps, play three high ♥s, starting with the honour from the shorter side first and discard a ♦ from dummy. Then you can lose just one ♦ and trump a ♦ loser in dummy

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7532	♠QJT98
	♥K3	♥AQ2
	♦765	♦A42
	♣AK83	♣64

- Best is to *duck* the opening ♦ lead at trick one and win the ace on the second lead of the suit
- Then play the high ♥s, and pitch the ♦ loser
- Ruff the final ♦ from your hand *high* with the 7♠
- You did remember to *ruff high*, didn't you?