Setting Up Long Suits

One of the best ways to create extra tricks/winners is promoting small cards in long suits. This is the most natural way to develop tricks. Ruffing losers is another great method, but it does use up your trump resources. The longer your suit, and the more high cards you have, the more likely you can set the suit up.

Consider   AKxxxx (6th)   opp   Qxx

With a 6-3 fit and the top 3 cards, you are very likely to win every card in the suit. This is because the opponents only have 4 cards, and they will be 2-2 41% of the time, and 3-1 50%, meaning 41+50=91% of the time, you win all the tricks (naturally).

Lets consider some other suit combinations for length tricks

- AQxxx   opp   Kxx.
  Since 5 cards will break 3-2 68% of the time, you are a 2-1 favourite to win all 5 tricks naturally.
- AKxxxx (6th)   opp   Jxx.
  Since the missing 4 cards will break 2-2 41%, that is your odds of winning all 6 tricks naturally. Of course, if you do lose one trick, the rest of the small cards are now good, unless the break was 4-0, only a 10% chance.
- KQxxxx (6th)   opp   xx
  This adds the issue of where the A is. The opp's 5 cards will break 3-2 68% of the time. Half of the time, the Ace will be before the KQ…, meaning you will take 5 tricks 68 X 0.5 = 34% of the time. And you will take 4 tricks 34% of the time. Note this analysis does not consider the 4-1 and 5-0 breaks

Often, you will need to lose one trick of your long suit to establish the suit.

- AKxxx   opp   xxx
  Win A, K, then lose 3rd trick (assumes you have outside entry). If opp's 5 cards are dividing 3-2, you have now established the two remaining spot cards as winners.
- KQJxxx (6th)   opp   xx
  Knock out the Ace with K,Q or J. If suit breaks 3-2, you now have 5 natural winners. If the suit breaks 4-1, you will have to ruff once to establish rest of cards as winners. Also note you improve your chances by leading (weakness to strength) towards the strong hand repeatedly, keeping your losers to only one if the Ace is before the honours.

It often is advisable to test a long suit early in the hand

Often, you will need to ruff one (or more) trick(s) of your long suit to establish the suit

AKxxxx (6th)   opp   xx
Play A, play K, trump 3rd one. If opponent's 5 cards are dividing 3-2, you have now established all 3 small cards as natural winners, for a total of 5 long tricks and 1 trumped trick.

Often, you can finesse to establish winners, and perhaps win all the tricks

- AQJxx   opp   xxx
  Lead low from E and finesse the J. If it wins, come back to E and repeat (once again, or twice). You will win all 5 tricks when the K is favourably placed. Even if you lose one trick to the K, you still make 4 natural tricks, assuming a 3-2 break of opp's cards.
- AKJxxx (6th)   opp   xx
  Lead low from E and finesse the J. The finesse is slightly better play, at 50%. Plan B is to play A, K, hoping to drop the Q, but a holding of Q doubleton is around 40%

Establishing long suits requires that you consider the entries needed to do so. Remember, outside of the suit itself, you may need an entry to set up the suit, and then another one to get to the good long cards so you can cash these long trick

- Use the suit itself as much as possible.
  Holding AKxxx opp   xxx   do not cash A,K, then lose trick. To preserve entries, duck the 1st or 2nd round of the suit, hence you can get to the long tricks using the suit itself as the entry
- Sometimes, you need to use trump as your entries.

You may have to decide WHICH of two long suits to establish, as both may offer opportunities.

You may have to set up a rather meager looking suit to make your contract.

Be sure to check that you have the timing to set up your long suit.

PROBABILITY OF SUIT DISTRIBUTIONS IN THE DEFENDERS' HANDS

- An odd number of missing cards will tend to break evenly
- An even number of missing cards will tend to break oddly

# of Your Combined Cards	# of Missing Cards	Suit Break Odds	
11	2	1-1 52%	2-0 48%
10	3	2-1 78%	3-0 22%
9	4	3-1 50%	2-2 41%
8	5	3-2 68%	4-1 28%
7	6	4-2 48%	3-3 32%