

Simple End Plays

To End Play someone sounds like a really sophisticated move that belongs to the sharks at the bridge table. Not True! If we play according to sound declarer playing principles we find that we – even if we don't realize it – sometimes end play the defenders. So what is an end play. We already know that finessing is the manuver of last resort. That means that endplays often replace the need to finesse. There is a 2nd case where the endplay rescues us. There are certain suit holdings that, as declarer, we benefit if the defenders lead the suit. Lets look at some:

KJ3 Kx(x) Ax Kxx Qxx

AT5 xx(x) Qx Qxx Jxx

We recognize the first as a two-way finesse, the others are finesse- or psuedo-finesse- -able holdings. In the last example we can hardly expect to win even one trick if we lead the suit but can gain a trick if the opponents lead the suit multiple times. In the next to last example we can get one trick if we lead the suit but increase the chances of getting two tricks if the defense leads the suit. Enough said – there are certain holdings that the declarer can reap a benefit if, somehow, the defenders can be induced into leading the suit. That is what endplays are all about. If we can seduce the defenders into leading into our tenace or give us a ruff-and-sluff or 'break a suit' we can gain a trick. So the question arises “Is there a way to recognize this potential?” The potential for an end play. YES! If we have any of those three situations confronting us then we should look for the other conditions that endplays require. Those conditions are: 1. Sufficient trump in both hands that there is at least 1 remaining in each hand after the trump draw – that's what sets up the possibility of a ruff & sluff. 2. A suit that can be eliminated from both hands or conversely from the hand of the victim hand. 3. The victim hand is the opponent who will be put on lead at the proper time – this requires a second side suit in which we have an affordable loser. That may sound like a lot of conditions to think about but they arise enough that it makes it worth it to investigate the possibility. It all hinges on having that “troublesome suit” and it helps us find the other conditions if we think in terms of another descriptor of this procedure. The other name for the endplay is “strip and throw-in”. Where “strip” refers to the eliminate-able suit and throw-in refers to the suit with the affordable loser. An example is in order. You are in a horrid 5♦ contract looking at the following hands after a ♥7 opening lead ♠A72

♥83 ♦K9842 ♣Q84

♠KJT ♥A ♦AJT752 ♣A83

There's a ♠ loser and 2♣ losers and it appears that the only means of making the contract is for the ♠ finesse to work. Faced with the thought of having to finesse our mind turns to the possibility of an endplay. That's *the trigger!* So now do we have a) Sufficient Trump? Yes even if trump is 2-0; b) an suit we can strip/eliminate? Yes, ♥'s; c) a side “throw-in suit”? Yes, ♣'s. So we win the opening lead, draw trump, ruff our 2nd ♥, take our ♣A and lead a ♣ toward the Q. If the ♣K is on side a ♣ loser has been avoided. If the K wins the trick the defenders can take a 2nd ♣ trick but then must give you a ruff & sluff (a ♠) by leading a ♥ or ♣ or lead a ♠ giving you a “free finesse”. If you attempt the finesse yourself and it loses you still have the 2 ♣ losers – down 1. Note that the critical “endplay”, i.e. the throw-in, occurred at trick 5. Hardly the last play of the hand, but the name for this technique persists because most of the time the “endplay” does occur further into the play of the hand. Here's an example where the “endplay” occurs at trick 8. You are in a 4♥ contract looking at the following hands after a ♠Q opening lead

♠852 ♥K8543 ♦AT5 ♣62

♠AKT ♥QJT72 ♦KJ2 ♣A3

You have 1 loser in each suit – one too many; but you have 2 (♦ or deep ♠) finesses and either could bring the contract home. You then remember that the finesse is the last thing we want to rely on. We need to eliminate just 1 loser to make our contract and endplays do just that. Is this hand eligible for an endplay?

Long Trump? Yes! A strip-able suit? Yes, ♣'s. A throw-in suit? Yes, ♠'s or ♦'s. We prefer the simple finesse to the deep finesse! We should note here that the throw-in suit always has the same number of cards in each hand – this feature leads to the suit being eliminated as well so in reality there are two

suits to be eliminated in endplays. In this hand we will use ♠'s as our throw-in suit. We have to lose a ♣ so we will duck the opening lead, winning trick 2 when ♣'s are continued. We also have a trump to lose which could be helpful if the winner leads a ♦, and it doesn't matter if they lead a ♠. The trump draw is completed so as to eliminate a safe lead for the player that wins the throw-in play. It takes 3 tricks for the trump draw (elimination). So far you have lost a ♣ and a ♥ but both those suits have now been "eliminated". All that's left is ♠ (your throw-in suit) and your troublesome suit, ♦'s. You take your ♠ winners and throw-in a defender with your 3rd loser. The defender is now faced with the choice of leading into your ♦ tenace or giving you a ruff & sluff – or is it a rough and slough. Now let's look at one where a finesse is not part of the picture.

♠5 ♥Q83 ♦JT8753 ♣654
 ♠KQ4 ♥AJT9742 ♦K2 ♣A

Again you are in a 4♥ contract and this time the opening is the ♠J. You have 1 ♠, 1 ♥, and 2 ♦ losers. One too many and you have a "untouchable" suit, ♦'s. If we lead ♦'s ourself we are sure of the 2 losers and we can't avoid loing to the ♠A. Either we pick up the ♥K or have to guess the ♦ situation. The later is something we would prefer not to do. The question is can we get our LHO to lead a ♦? Let's check the condition for an endplay. a) Sufficient trump? Yes. b) a strip-able suit, Yes ♠'s. c) a throw-in suit, No! The throw-in suit remember must be eliminated at the time of the throw-in; The remaining suit, ♣'s, doesn't fit the requirement. Could we reverse the role of the two black suits? No! The same deficiency exists if we do. Wait! What if we use the Trump suit as the throw-in suit after eliminating the black suits. Let's see. The opening lead, ♠J, is won by East, who follows with the ♥5. Could East be underleading the ♥K? There are only 3 outstanding Trump and if they are split 2-1 you will have an extra trump in the Dummy (for the ruff and sluff condition). It's unlikely that East would lead from ♥K5, but might lead the 5 from ♥K65 which would be a problem for the endplay. It is more probable that East is hoping that West has either the ♥A or ♥K and that they can get a Trump trick. So you play your ♥A and are bouyed by the thought that you were able to intuit the opponents trump holding when West plays the 6. The trump K has just been setup as the throw-in, you just need to eliminate the two black suits which is easily done by playing the ♣A and discarding the dummy's remaining ♣'s on your two good ♠'s. When you West on lead with the ♥K, a ♦lead or a ruff and sluff of a black suit solves your ♦ problem.