

Loser on Loser Plays

There will arise cases where you are tempted to trump a suit but the smarter move is to dump a loser on a trick where you have a loser. There are three different situations where you will benefit from giving up the trick rather than ruffing:

1. When by not trumping you set up a winner for your self.
2. When there is a danger that you will be over ruffed.
3. When you might lose trump control by ruffing.

1. You (south) are in a 4♥ contract with an Opening lead of a small ♠, East wins with the A and follows with a small ♠.

NORTH ♠Q74
 ♥AT3
 ♦KJ7
 ♣A74

SOUTH ♠9
 ♥KQJ95
 ♦AQ62
 ♣632

If you ruff the second trick, with the long hand you gain nothing – except the lead. The way the suit ♠ has evolved it is clear that the ♠K is with West. If West doesn't play the K your Q will win gaining a trick, if West plays the K the Q is setup as a winner. A better play is to discard a ♣ loser on the losing ♠ trick. After drawing trump you can play the ♠Q discarding a second ♣ loser and in this way you take 11 tricks versus the 10. Possibly a top board in match play.

2. You (north) are in a 4♠ contract, having bid 2 after East opened with a weak-2♥. East's opening lead is the ♥K wins is followed by ♥A also winning. East continues with a 3rd ♥ lead

NORTH ♠AKQJ73
 ♥965
 ♦7
 ♣A82

SOUTH ♠642
 ♥85
 ♦AJ765
 ♣K73

You could ruff the 3rd trick but it is clear from a count of the ♥ suit that West is also void in that suit and could possibly overruff you. You have an undeniable ♣ loser that you can shed on this 3rd trick. In doing this ♥'s are no longer a threat because you can ruff in the long hand. You don't gain a trick by ruffing in the long hand but you do gain one by eliminating a loser and avoiding a second loser by being over ruffed. You have traded 1 loser in ♣'s that was in your loser count for another loser in ♥'s that wasn't or shouldn't have been. Your contract is safe because you have just 3 ♥ losers.

3. This condition was a constant concern in the days of opening 4-card majors and find yourself in a 4-level contract and a 7-card fit. Whenever an opponent has as many trump as you have in the long hand you risk losing control of the trump suit which is often disastrous. South Opens 1♦ which gets passed out (nobody has a 5 card suit or a lot of points!) .

NORTH ♠974
 ♥T63

♦T97
♣KJ74
SOUTH ♠AKT
♥95
♦KJ62
♣Q832

West Opens with the ♥K following with the ♥A and then the ♥Q. At trick 3 you are tempted to ruff in order to gain control but if you do you will be left with just 3 trump. You started with 7 total trump so the likely split is 4-2, if you trump the 3rd trick a defender will have more trump than you and you will have lost trump control, and never be able to setup your ♣ winners. You can however dump your ♠ loser on trick 3 and preserve your trump length.