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(125) Declarer Play: Suits - Misfits and Moysians

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Level: Intermediate/Advanced

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General

Playing in a suit contract when we do not actually have an 8-card (or larger) fit is tricky and difficult. We are not fully in control of the hand and the opponents may have as many, if not more, trump than we do. We are usually in a part score if we do not have a fit – if we had enough points for game we would likely have reached 3N. In an effort to take our tricks we will need to consider two different approaches to the play.

- First: scramble for our tricks. This implies trying to just count our winners (both in the trump suit and side suits) and get them. We will not draw trump – leaving the opponents to win all the tricks at the end (this is similar to a cross ruff line of play when we actually have a fit).
- Second: draw trump or partially draw trump. In doing this we hope that the opponents' trump honors (our potential losers) fall on top of each other or that the trump break well for us (often 3-3). We are trying to prevent the opponents from scoring their trump separately.

5-2 Fits

If the misfit we land in is a 5-2 fit, then we have a trump suit that is likely larger than the opponents (4-2 outstanding trump split most likely). In this case we are still in control of the hand and thus we have the option of trying to draw trump. This will prevent the opponents from scoring their trump separately (if we are successful). We frequently play in a 5-2 fit when the auction has gone something like this:

Example

1♠ 1N

2♦ 2♠

(Partner should be returning to 2♠ when they have a Doubleton).

In this case, the 1♠ Opener may be short in the other two suits and thus be susceptible to being forced to ruff in the long side. This can cause Declarer to lose control of the hand (when an opponent has more trump than the Declarer). On hands like this Declarer cannot draw trump. In order for Declarer to be able to make the contact he must “scramble” for tricks – hopefully at least 8! This is done by scoring our high cards as winners and ruffing with as many of our little trump as possible. In a scramble, we count our winners, not our losers!



4-3 Fits – “Choosing a Moysian”

A 4-3 fit is common enough to have its own name, Moysian.

Note: 4-3 Fits were much more common years ago when people played 4-card Majors.

In many 4-3 fit part scores, we landed there because we did not have enough values to explore/invite game and we did not have a fit. In this case, we will only be able to draw trump if we do not need to ruff (like we have a strong side suit to try to setup) and we have strong enough trump to retain control. This will be rare, given that we do not have enough values to explore game. A more common line of play will be to partially draw trump (leaving the master outstanding) and then run our source of tricks, if we have one. Still, the most common line of play for these 4-3 fit part scores will be the scramble approach.

When we play a game in a 4-3 fit (usually a Major), it is because we do not have a full Major suit fit (no 8-card fit) and we do not believe that 3N will be a good contract. This means we likely have chosen the 4-3 fit over a minor suit fit – either because it will score better or we think we cannot make an 11-trick game. When we are playing a 4-3 fit we expect the trump to split 4-2. Thus, it is important that we do not ruff in the 4-card side because if we do, we will lose control of the hand. When we choose a 4-3 fit we want to be ruffing in the short side – to produce extra tricks, get rid of losers, and maintain control of the hand with a strong 4-card suit.

Example

- ♠ Axx
- ♥ x
- ♦ KQxxx
- ♣ ATxx

If we open this hand 1♦ and Partner responds 1♠ we will frequently raise to 2♠ even on just 3-card support. That Axx support for partner’s 4+card Major and an outside singleton means we can visualize the hand playing well. Even if we end up in a 4-3 fit rather than a 5-3, the hand should work out with partner ruffing in the short side!

Conclusion

Playing a hand in a suit contract without the power of a trump fit can be difficult. We will for good reason feel out of control. It can be unnerving as we are used to having a trump suit that gives us strength over the opponents. In most of these hands we turn our focus to playing as we would in Notrump - we count winners! These winners should be quickly developed (top tricks, developed winners, finesses) and be combined with a scramble of ruffs in both hands to produce our tricks. So when playing a misfit take your time and make a plan to produce enough winners to make your contract!