

Week 2 (of 5) -- TRUMP

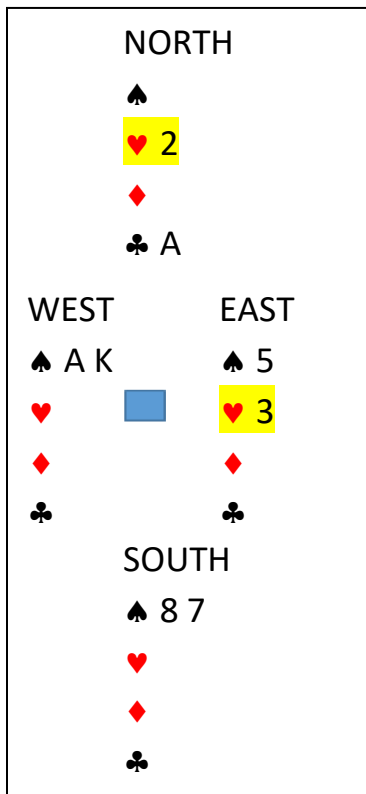
The concept of a “trump suit” adds an intriguing dimension to bridge. In week one, we were playing without a trump suit—thus “notrump.”

Some deals are indeed played without a trump suit (determined by the bidding). More often than not, there is a trump suit. Whichever side wins the auction (discussed in a few weeks) gets to determine if there is no trump suit, or what the trump suit is.

A trump suit contains 13 “wild cards.” Each trump outranks all other cards in the deck. The lowly two of the trump suit wins against the ace of any other suit!

You are permitted to lead (to start a trick) any card in the trump suit at any time. If a trump is led, everyone who has a card in the trump suit must “follow suit.” You can also play a trump if you don’t have a card (“void”) in the suit that was led to the trick.

Assume it is West’s lead, the trump suit is hearts and consider this diagram:



Suppose West leads the ♠A to start a trick. North can’t follow suit (he has no spades). Since hearts are trump (determined in the bidding/auction), North can win the trick by playing the ♥2. If it were notrump, the ♠A would win the trick and the ♥2 would just be an insignificant discard. But here the ♥2 wins if hearts are trump (East and South must follow suit with spades on the trick). North leads to the next trick. When he leads the ♣A, East will win the trick by playing his ♥3. This is called “trumping.” You can trump only if you are out of the suit led.

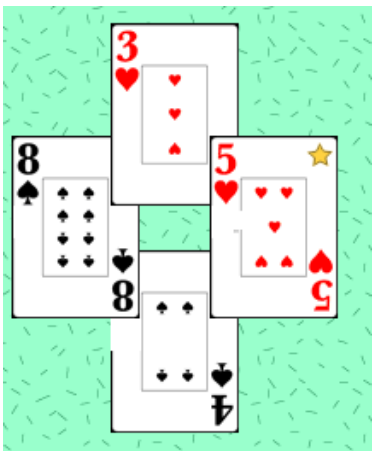
Here is another look at a trump suit in action:

NORTH (dummy)	
♠ 3 2	
♥ J 4 3	
♦ 2	
WEST	EAST
♠ Q J 10 9 8 7	♠ 6 5
♥ --	♥ 9 8 5 2
SOUTH	
♠ A K 4	
♥ A K Q	

Again, assume the trump suit is hearts (determined in the auction/bidding). Only six cards are shown (each player has seven other cards, of course, but they are not relevant to this illustration). West leads the ♠Q. North and East contribute low spades and South wins the ♠A and then wins his ♠K on the next trick.

Then, South plays his ♠4 so that he can trump it in the North hand. Remember that South (as well as West and East) can all see North's (dummy's) cards. South should trump the ♠4 with dummy's ♥J because that will definitely win the trick. If dummy were to trump with a lower heart, East could "overtrump." East has

no more spades, so could play any card. Because his ♥5 is higher than dummy's ♥43, he could win the trick by "over-trumping".



This diagram shows what happens if dummy trumped with the ♥3 instead of the ♥J. East's ♥5 would win the trick.

Let's look at a full deal with a trump suit (assume hearts are trump—as determined by the bidding which will be explained later, and that South is declarer):

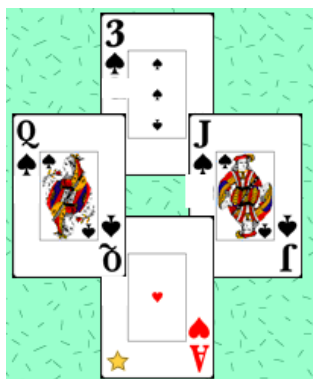
NORTH (dummy)	
♠ K 6 4 3 2	
♥ K Q J 8	
♦ A 2	
♣ 10 9	
WEST	EAST
♠ Q 10 9	♠ J 6 5
♥ 7 3	♥ 6 4
♦ Q J 9 7	♦ 10 8 4 3
♣ K Q 8 5	♣ J 7 6 3
SOUTH	
♠ A 7	
♥ A 10 9 5 2	
♦ K 6 5	
♣ A 4 2	

First, imagine there was no trump suit at all. Say West were to start off by leading the ♣K. South could win the ♣A and take a lot of tricks. After winning the ♣A, South (declarer) could play a low diamond at trick two and win the ♦A in North's (dummy's) hand and then at trick three, the ♦K in his hand. Also, he could take tricks with the ♠A and ♠K. That's five tricks. In the heart suit, he could take five more. He could take the king, queen, jack and then lead the ♥8 to win two more tricks with his ♥A and ♥10. After that, he would have only low losing cards left and East-West would take the last three tricks.

Those 10 tricks for North-South are nice, but with hearts as trump, all 13 tricks can be taken!

Suppose West starts with the ♣K. South wins the ♣A and then plays a diamond won by dummy's ace. A low diamond is played and won by South's ♦K. Next, South can lead his third diamond, a low one. He won't lose the trick because dummy has no more diamonds. South can play a trump from the North hand and that wins the trick (even though both East and West have higher diamonds than the one South led).

The lead is now in dummy. A low spade is led and won by South's ♠A. A low spade from South is taken by dummy's (North's) ♠K.



Now comes a fun play, very common in trump contracts. A low spade is led from dummy and trumped by South. South trumps with a high trump (like the ace). Why? Because if West also had no spades, he could "overtrump." South could trump with, say the two, but West, if he were also out of spades could win the trick by playing a higher trump ("overtrumping"). As it is, West has to follow suit with a spade. At this point, there are two small spades in dummy but they are "established." Nobody else has any spades.

Should South go to dummy in another suit and play those good spades? Not yet. If he were to play a good spade, the defenders could “trump.” To enjoy those good spades, declarer’s next step is to “draw trumps.” He plays a trump and wins in dummy with the ♥K. He then plays more high trumps from dummy until he knows the opponents have none left. He can know by counting. There are only 13 cards in each suit. On this deal, an experienced declarer will know not only that dummy’s low spades are “good” (because they are the only spades left), but also know when the opponents have no hearts (trumps) remaining. At that point, he can indeed lead dummy’s spades. Each one will win a trick. On each of them, he will throw away one of his low clubs.

Declarer takes every trick—all 13 of them! Please lay out a deck of cards and follow along with the description above.

One of the interesting strategies presented when there is a trump suit is whether or not to “draw trump.” By “draw,” we mean to “get rid of” the trump in the opponent’s hands. Why might we do that? Consider this diagram:

NORTH (dummy)	
♠ K Q J 8 2	
♥ Q J 8	
♦ --	
♣ --	
WEST	EAST
♠ 10 9 7	♠ 5 4
♥ 7	♥ 6 4
♦ 7 2	♦ A 8 4
♣ K Q	♣ J
SOUTH (declarer)	
♠ A 7 3	
♥ A K 9	
♦ 5	
♣ 2	

Suppose that spades is the trump suit. Five tricks have been played and these 8 cards remain. It is South’s turn.

What if South were to attempt to win 3 heart tricks? He leads the ♥A and it wins the trick. Then on the next heart trick, West won’t have any. He can trump with a spade. West would win the trick. This would be costly for South. Instead of playing the winning hearts, declarer should first “draw trump.” He plays the ♠A, then another spade winning with the ♠K. Then he plays the ♠Q. At that point, East-West have no more spades (South knows this by counting—there are 13 cards in each suit). Then, and only then, should South play those winning hearts. East-West will be unable to trump.

In many other situations, though, it is poor strategy to “draw trump.” There could be many reason to leave the opponents with trump in their hand. That sort of planning and strategy can be studied or read about once you are done learning the basics in this series.

We are ready to move to the other major part of bridge—the bidding. Personally, I think the play of the cards is the fun part of the game. In a game that preceeded bridge (Whist), there wasn’t bidding. A card was turned face up to determine the trump suit and play began. Bidding can bog new players down. I strongly believe that play of the cards should be learned first. Once you have digested everything presented so far, please move on to the bidding.

Quiz

- 1) If West leads the ♠A and North has the ♠3 and a trump (let’s say hearts are trump), can North win the trick?
- 2) Assume West leads the ♣A and North (dummy) has no clubs. Declarer calls for the ♦ 4 from dummy and diamonds are trump. Will North win the trick?
- 3) If South is dealt all 13 spades, how many tricks will he win?
- 4) Does every deal have to have a trump suit?

Answers

- 1) No. North must follow suit in spades.
- 2) Probably. If East is also out of clubs, he could potentially “over-trump” with a higher diamond.
- 3) If spades are trump, all 13. Otherwise, not a single trick!
- 4) No. Some deals are played without trump (notrump) as determined in the bidding.