

ESTABLISHING A LONG SUIT AT NT

Establishing a long suit is one way of converting low cards into additional winners. Success is usually dependent upon the distribution of the opponents' cards in the suit.

Let's consider the following suit combination:

North
A 8 6 4 3
South
K 7 5 2

We'll always be able to win tricks with the ace and king, but what about the lower cards?

Suppose the EW cards are distributed something like this:

	North	
West	A 8 6 4 3	East
Q 10	South	J 9
	K 7 5 2	

We start by cashing the ace and king (in either order). When both opponents follow suit, our remaining small cards are all promoted into winners. We finish up making all five tricks in the suit, but we should note that this is only possible against a 2-2 break (a 40% chance).

The opposing cards are more likely to be distributed something like this:

	North	
West	A 8 6 4 3	East
Q 10 9	South	J
	K 7 5 2	

It's still right to cash the ace and king, but this time East discards on the second round. We now play a third round of the suit and lose a trick to West's queen, but after this we again have tricks with our remaining small cards.

We finish up making four tricks in the suit, which will be the outcome about 50% of the time

Even in the remaining 10% of cases we can still establish a long card:

	North	
West	A 8 6 4 3	East
Q J 10 9	South	none
	K 7 5 2	

The 4-0 break is unpleasant, but we can still establish a long card by cashing one or both top honours, then losing two tricks to West. We finish up with only three tricks, but that is the best that we can do here.

To summarise: we can always establish additional winners in this suit, but their number will depend upon the distribution of the EW cards.

Sometimes we don't know whether our small cards can become winners. Here's a simple example:

North
A 6 4 2
South
K Q 4

It's clear that our combined AKQ will win three tricks, but what about North's 2? This will again depend upon how the EW cards are distributed.

If we're lucky the situation will be something like this:

	North	
West	A 6 4 2	East
J 9 5	South	10 8 7
	K Q 4	

We cash our three top winners, after which the 3-3 break means that North's 2 is a fourth-round winner. Note: in the play of a full hand it would normally be best to start by cashing South's KQ before playing to North's ace. Now the lead is in the right hand to cash the 2 immediately. (This is

an example of the principle of playing honours from the short hand first.)

In practice the probability of a 3-3 split is only 36%, so we're more likely to encounter something like this:

	North	
West	A 6 4 2	East
J 9 8 5	South	10 7
	K Q 4	

Whatever we do we can only win tricks with our top cards. Note: playing off our top cards will set up West's jack for an additional defensive trick, so in the play of a full hand we might want to defer playing on this suit.

Here is a more promising suit:

North
A Q 7 5 4
South
K 6 2

We still only have three top winners, but this time there's a much better chance of further tricks.

The most likely scenario (68%) is that the opponents' cards are split 3-2, for example:

	North	
West	A Q 7 5 4	East
J 9 3	South	10 8
	K 6 2	

After cashing our AKQ North's remaining 75 have both become winners, giving us all five tricks in the suit. Once again it's usually best to win the third round in dummy so that the low cards can be cashed immediately.

Now let's see what happens in the event of a 4-1 split (28%):

	North	
West	A Q 7 5 4	East
J 9 8 3	South	10
	K 6 2	

This time cashing our AKQ doesn't leave North's 75 as winners, because West still has the jack. Nevertheless, we can still lead one of North's low cards to knock out West's jack, after which North's remaining card has been established as a fourth winner in the suit.

Setting up a long card is only impossible if the suit splits 5-0, which is only a 4% chance.

For all of the suits that we've seen so far it has sometimes been possible to promote the low cards into winners without losing a trick, but this isn't always the case. This sort of situation is fairly common:

North
A K 5 4 3
South
8 6 2

It's impossible to win all five tricks here because after cashing the AK one opponent will have a card higher than South's 8. Even so, it's usually worth playing on this suit to set up one or two extra tricks.

We're hoping that the suit splits 3-2:

	North	
West	A K 5 4 3	East
J 9 7	South	Q 10
	8 6 2	

When both opponents follow suit to North's AK we lose the third round, after which North's 54 are both winners. If the North hand has no entry in another suit we can address this problem by losing the first or second round instead.

	North	
West	A K 5 4 3	East
J 10 9 7	South	Q
	8 6 2	

If the suit is splitting 4-1 then we could still set up one long card by giving up two tricks first. And as before a 5-0 split would prevent us making any tricks from our low cards at all.

Finally it is worth having another look at table showing the percentages of how the missing cards are likely to be split.

You do not need to know this by heart, but note the most likely splits, which follow a similar pattern:

- An odd number of cards missing are most likely to split as evenly as possible.
- An even number of cards missing are less likely to split evenly.

Cards missing	Split	%
2	1-1	52
	2-0	48
3	2-1	78
	3-0	22
4	3-1	50
	2-2	40
	4-0	10
5	3-2	68
	4-1	28
	5-0	4
6	4-2	48
	3-3	36
	5-1	15
	6-0	1
7	4-3	63
	5-2	31
	6-1	6
	7-0	< 1

Whenever declarer and dummy have more than six cards between them and insufficient high cards, there's always a chance of setting up low cards. The more cards between the two hands, the better the prospects.

Now test your skill with some practice hands on establishing small cards as winners:

[Level 1 hands](#)

[Level 2 hands](#)

[Level 3 hands](#)