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A set of six deals on end-plays including ruff-and-discard eliminations. ACOL version.

VB#24 (Strip and) End-plays Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 4S By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ 8753	
	♥ AK2	
	♦ 853	
	♣ 943	
West		East
♠ 9		♠ 62
♥ Q86		♥ T974
♦ K94		♦ JT762
♣ AKJ872		♣ QT
	South	
	♠ AKQJT4	
	♥ J53	
	♦ AQ	
	♣ 65	

This series is looking at making the opponents do the donkey work. There is another series that precedes this one with an identical theme.

The aim of an *end-play* is to put an opponent on lead at a time of our choosing so that he makes a lead that is advantageous to our side. That lead may be into a tenace (such as into an A Q combination) or it may open up a *frozen suit*.

Usually we have considerable preparation work to set up an end-play, by removing all the extra cards from the relevant opponents' hands. When we do this we are said to *eliminate suits* or *strip* them.

In a suit contract one of the losing options that the defenders have is to offer us a *ruff-and-discard*. This is a lead of a suit into a double void, allowing declarer to trump in one hand and discard a loser from the other. Good news for declarer, generally very bad news for the defence.

Hand 1. Here, you can try to make your contract by means of an everyday, common-or-garden finesse.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♠
2♣	2♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ A

We reach 4♠ on this deal having opened 1♠, noted a 2♣ overcall from West and seen partner support Spades.

Our initial **Count** and **Plan** shows that we have four potential losers with one Heart, two Clubs and a possible Diamond. Counting winners we see just nine (six Spades, two Hearts and the ♦A). We cannot **trump** or **dump** a loser, but there's always the Diamond finesse to fall back on.

However... we know that West has made a two-level overcall, which should show a decent hand. There's no point in overcalling 2♣ on rubbish – West has no business bidding 2♣ to hear the sound of his own voice. If we had to place any missing honours, we should place them in West.

Is there a Plan B? What if we were able to force West on lead at the end, when we have nothing left but Diamonds and trumps? A Diamond lead from West would solve all of our problems, regardless of the location of the ♦K.

Let's see. West takes the first two Club tricks, and at trick three wisely leads another Club rather than open up a can of worms by leading a red suit.

We ruff the third Club (high, just in case we want an entry to dummy later in the hand) and pull the opponents' trumps in two rounds. Now comes the cost-nothing attempt at an end-play on West. We simply play off the ♥A K and lead another Heart. We are hoping that West was dealt the ♥Q and that this play will put him on lead.

Now you can see that West has been backed into a corner from which there is no escape. If West leads a Diamond, he takes our finesse for us. A Club lead (or the thirteenth Heart if he held it) would furnish a ruff-and-discard.

Deciding that a Club lead is the least of the available evils West tries that defence. **Careful!** We have to ruff that in dummy and chuck the ♦Q away from hand. Chucking a Diamond from the table and ruffing in hand is self-defeating as we'd still need the Diamond finesse.

However, finesses go wrong 50% of the time – more than that if the bidding suggests a key card is wrong.

As it is, we have only winning trumps and the ♦A so can claim the game.


Can you put yourself on the right side of the odds here?



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VB#24 (Strip and) End-plays Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 6S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ AQT7		
	♥ AJT		
	♦ K4		
	♣ AK73		
West		East	
♠ 52		♠ 93	
♥ 953		♥ KQ8	
♦ JT97		♦ 86532	
♣ J962		♣ T54	
	South		
	♠ KJ864		
	♥ 7642		
	♦ AQ		
	♣ Q8		

Partner's bidding is succinct here – brief and to the point.

There is an obvious way to play the hand – a familiar line that gives us a 75% chance.

Can we improve on that?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	4NT	P	5♦
P	5NT	P	6♦
P	6♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

Partner's bidding is a little rustic here. He is fully entitled to bid a slam after we open 1♠ but just employing Blackwood to ask for Aces and Kings is simplistic in approach. Would he have bid 7♠ had we shown two Kings? If not, why bid 5NT?

Anyway, the slam is a good one so we mustn't grumble too much. The only irritation is that the North-South Diamonds are "mirrored" with a doubleton each. The ♦A K Q are worth two tricks only.

West's ♦J lead gives us time to plan the hand in comfort. We can see only two possible losers and they are both in Hearts. Counting winners we can see eleven (five Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and three Clubs).

Now, the position in Hearts and the associated play are well known. The right technique is referred to as a *combination finesse* with declarer playing a small Heart to the ♥10 and, assuming that it loses, later playing a Heart to the ♥J. This way two tricks are assured whenever West has one (or both) of the missing honours. That equates to a 75% chance.

This is good odds – but we want to improve them if we can. The trick here is to delay the critical finesse until the other suits have been stripped. Now when the first Heart finesse loses East will be stymied, unable to lead anything that doesn't give us a trick.

So, with this plan in mind, we win the Diamond lead in hand with the ♦Q and draw trumps in two rounds. Next come four rounds of Clubs, ruffing the last one in hand. Finally the ♦A is cashed and we have prepared the ground for an end-play.

With only Hearts and Spades left we play a Heart to the ♥10 and await East's choice of *félo de se*. He is end-played into giving us the twelfth trick no matter what he leads or how the cards lie. A ruff-and-discard (his actual choice) allows us to ditch a losing Heart while ruffing in the other hand. It's satisfying to note that the ♥K

Q are both offside, making this line of play essential.


You may note that West could have beaten the slam with an initial Heart lead. Not being gifted with either X-ray vision nor second sight he made the eminently sensible lead of the top of his Diamond sequence.



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A set of six deals on end-plays including ruff-and-discard eliminations. ACOL version.

VB#24 (Strip and) End-plays Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 6H By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North		
	♠ A2		
	♥ T9842		
	♦ KJ3		
	♣ 752		
West		East	
♠ 9		♠ KJT87653	
♥ 73		♥	
♦ 964		♦ QT75	
♣ JT98643		♣ Q	
	South		
	♠ Q4		
	♥ AKQJ65		
	♦ A82		
	♣ AK		

Here we reach a reasonable contract and have to decide what to do.

The opening lead gives us a clue and suggests we may be able to do some damage to an opponent.

Can you see how?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	2♣
P	2NT	3♣	4♥
P	4♣	P	5♣
P	6♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ 9

We arrive in 6♥ after an adventurous auction that involved a 2♣ opening bid, a positive response and East entering bidding with 3♣. West (unsurprisingly) leads his partner's suit and we can see why partner became excited as the auction progressed.

Anyway, the play's the thing. A count of losers shows a sure Spade loser and a possible Diamond loser. So... take the ♠A, draw trumps and take the Diamond finesse, then?

Well, that's a 50% shot – and why make the hand a 50-50 proposition when you have a sure thing via an end-play? You can be certain that East has the ♠K, both from the bidding and from this opening lead.

With a strip-and-end-play as our plan we take the ♠A and pull trumps in two rounds. Next we cash the ♣A K; we need to rid ourselves of dummy's baby Club so, using a trump as an entry, we cross over to dummy and ruff the last Club in hand.

At this juncture we have we have no Clubs in either hand. By leading our inevitable loser (the ♠Q) East will be forced on lead with it. Look at his hand. All he can do is give us a Diamond lead straight into dummy's ♦K J 3 or provide a *ruff-and-discard*.


With a sigh of disgust he leads a Spade. It doesn't matter at that point which hand we ruff in...the outcome is the same. We get to throw off a Diamond loser, enabling us to trump our last Diamond.



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A set of six deals on end-plays including ruff-and-discard eliminations. ACOL version.

VB#24 (Strip and) End-plays Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North		
	♠ 743		
	♥ AQ75		
	♦ 953		
	♣ A82		
West		East	
♠ KQJ92		♠ T6	
♥ 82		♥ JT93	
♦ KJ72		♦ T64	
♣ 75		♣ JT93	
	South		
	♠ A85		
	♥ K64		
	♦ AQ8		
	♣ KQ64		

End-plays can be bought into play in No-trumps as well as in suit contracts.

True, you can't offer the opponents the option of giving you a ruff-and-discard but you can make them lead from a holding that they'd rather keep intact.

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♣
1♠	X	P	2NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ K

With two 4-3-3-3 hands and a combined 28 points the obvious spot is 3NT and we duly arrive there, noting a 1♠ intervention by West on the way.

We have one Spade winner, three Hearts, one Diamond and three Clubs. That totals eight tricks – so we are one short of target. We hope to get our ninth trick with a 3-3 split in either Hearts or Clubs or maybe a Diamond finesse. Not too much to hope for, right?

We decide to duck the first trick and take the second. Both the bidding and the play (East showing up with the ♠10) confirms the 5-2 Spade break. There's no point in holding up the ♠A again (indeed, it would be quite wrong to do so) so we take the Ace and consider our chances.

We try three rounds of Clubs and West shows out on the third round. East (sly as ever) drops the ♣10 and ♣J on the last two rounds, hoping that you'll miscount the suit. A repeat performance follows in Hearts, down to East's shenanigans in false-carding.

Meanwhile, West has had to discard twice and throws two small Diamonds away, professing little interest in that quarter. A wily pair of defenders, these two, aren't they?

Now, you could just take the Diamond finesse and hope that *something* is right for you on this hand but why perform a menial task when you can get someone else to do it for you?

We know we have have stripped West of everything except Diamonds and Spades. We also know that West only has three winning Spades left. So we throw him on lead with a Spade and invite him to cash his winners. As he does so we have plenty of rubbish to put in the skip.

When West has finished enjoying himself he has nothing left but Diamonds and has to lead one around into the ♦A Q. Regardless of where the ♦K is we have two Diamond tricks and the contract. It's more satisfying to know that

the Diamond finesse would have lost had we taken it ourselves.


There's nothing quite like making an opponent take our finesses for us...



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A set of six deals on end-plays including ruff-and-discard eliminations. ACOL version.

VB#24 (Strip and) End-plays Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 6C
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 5
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ A852		
	♥ AQ8		
	♦ AK		
	♣ QJ74		
West		East	
♠ KQJ4		♠ 9763	
♥ J963		♥ KT4	
♦ J962		♦ T7543	
♣ 2		♣ 6	
	South		
	♠ T		
	♥ 752		
	♦ Q8		
	♣ AKT9853		

Another rapid bidding sequence to a high-level contract.

What play gives you the best chance?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	3♣
P	6♣	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ K

You arrive in a slam after the briefest of auctions. Your 3♣ opening bid with a fine seven-card suit and little else is pretty much as per textbook and North's raise to slam is a fair shot with 20 points, lots of *quick tricks* and four-card trump support.

West leads the ♠K and now you have to decide how to play the hand. The infuriating duplication in Diamonds means that you have two potential losers in Hearts (note in passing that had you started with two low Hearts and ♦Q × × the slam would have been laydown).

Your initial plan, therefore, appears to rest on the Heart finesse. You could draw trumps and play a Heart to the ♥Q, making the slam if West has the ♥K and failing if East is in possession of His Majesty. That's 50-50, can we improve on that?

Well, it costs you little to play the hand on elimination lines. Take the ♠A, draw trumps (in one round), ruff three Spades in hand and cash the ♦A K as you are ruffing out the Spades.

Having stripped the hand to be more bare than Mother Hubbard's cupboard it's time now to play a Heart. When West follow with a low card we must be careful to just cover with the ♥8. We aren't forced into taking a Heart finesse. Our goal is to make East take the trick and end-play him.

East takes the ♥8 with the ♥10 and sighs deeply. He has the charming choice of leading a Heart into dummy's ♥A Q or of leading a Diamond, offering a fatal ruff-and-discard. Heads he loses, Tails we win. East's actual choice (a Diamond) gives us no problems at all as we now know how to deal with these ruff-and-discards. (Ruffs-and-discards? Ruffs-and-discard? Whatever).

Have you noticed how East-West might have defended this hand with a little more perception? If so, you can be transported to a defender's chair and demonstrate your prowess.







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A set of six deals on end-plays including ruff-and-discard eliminations. ACOL version.

VB#24 (Strip and) End-plays Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 6H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	3♥	P
6♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♦ K

*[This deal, of course, is Hand 5 all over again rotated by 90 degrees and with the suits transposed. Of course, you knew that, didn't you?]*

East-West blast their way to a Heart slam in two bids and you have an easy and obvious lead of the ♦K. Dummy displays a fine hand and is well worth the punt at a slam facing a vulnerable 3♥ pre-empt.

Declarer seems intent on playing the hand via a strip-and-end-play. He draws trumps (both of them!), ruffs three Diamonds in hand, eliminates the ♣A K and finally ends up in his hand. Now he leads a Spade and it's your turn to shine. What do you do?

Well, it's very tempting to follow the old adage of "second player plays low" and just put your lowest Spade on this trick. However, if you do, East will cover your ♠6 with dummy's ♠8 and force your partner on lead. If you watch carefully you might just discern the look of reproach in North's eyes the instant before they glaze over and he has to make a fatal lead...

However, this is your opportunity to shine. In these positions it is often right to play a high card to thwart declarer's ambitions. The ♠9 (or the ♠J, if you want to be flash) will give declarer a problem he cannot solve.

Whichever of the three cards he plays (the ♠A, the ♠Q or the ♠8) he has two Spade losers and the slam fails. In practice, he plays the ♠8 in the forlorn hope that North's three Spades are precisely the ♠K J 10 and that North will be forced to win the trick and lead a Spade. An excellent try – but no cigar. East now has to rely on the Spade finesse and is down when it fails.

Playing the ♠9 is good, sharp defence. It's very easy to lose focus in these hands and just play on autopilot, confining your duties to the routine task of following suit. However, you should be aware of declarer's plan and you should be thinking of ways you might thwart it.

So now, not only can you make end-plays you can foil them, too...

North

♠ KT4  
♥ 6  
♦ 9763  
♣ T7543

West

♠ AQ8  
♥ QJ74  
♦ A852  
♣ AK



East

♠ 752  
♥ AKT9853  
♦ T  
♣ Q8

South

♠ J963  
♥ 2  
♦ KQJ4  
♣ J962

You have been transported to a defender's seat.

Can you defend accurately against a boldly bid slam?