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This Week in Bridge

(274) End Plays in Notrump Contracts

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Level: 3

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General

The *end play* is a valuable tool for avoiding taking a finesse that we expect is not working (or avoiding having to make a guess in a suit). The idea is to force our opponent to lead away from their honor (and into our holding) instead of leading into them. In a suit contract, we can often ruff away or otherwise eliminate the side suits and create a situation where the opponents are forced to either give us a ruff-sluff or lead into the suit we want them to lead, called a strip and endplay. Let's take a look at how to apply a similar endplay technique in notrump contracts.

Throwing an Opponent on Lead – Ducking a Trick into Them

One way to set up an end play in a notrump contract is to play off the other suits so that our LHO has nothing left but the suit we want to force them to lead for us. At this point, we lead a card from dummy and attempt to force our LHO (assuming they are the player we wish to endplay) to win the trick.

Example 1

♠ xxx
♠ KJx ♠ xxx
♠ AQT

If we know (or strongly suspect) that our LHO has only ♠ remaining in this 3-card end position, then we can lead a ♠ from the dummy and play the ♠T from our hand. Even if LHO wins the trick with the ♠J (the finesse not forcing out the King) they will be forced to lead a ♠ into our ♠AQ. They are endplayed.

Note: This can be done when we have a smaller spot card than the Ten: all we have to do is be able to cover the card played by our RHO, forcing our LHO to win the trick.

A similar play can be made from many other holdings.



Example 2

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      xxx
AQx      Jxx
      KTx
  
```

If we lead from dummy and RHO does not play an honor card, then we can simply play the Ten. This puts LHO on lead and forces them to lead into our King (if they have only this suit remaining). They are endplayed.

Throwing an Opponent on Lead – Using Their Winner

Another way to endplay our LHO is to put them on lead using a winner in another suit.

Example 3

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      ♠ J
      ♥ xx
♠ Q      ♠ --
♥ Kx      ♥ xxx
      ♠ —
      ♥ AQx
  
```

If we know that LHO has the ♠Q, we can use the ♠J to throw them on lead and force them to lead into our ♥ tenace – ♥AQ. They are endplayed.

Example 4

Even if we do not know that LHO has the ♠Q, if the ♠Q is the only remaining card other than ♥, this play is “free” – it has no risk. If LHO has the ♠Q, they are endplayed, and if RHO has the ♠Q, they win this trick and must lead a ♥ for us.

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      ♠ J
      ♥ xx
♠ --      ♠ Q
♥ xxx      ♥ Kx
      ♠ —
      ♥ AQx
  
```

We play the ♠J; if RHO wins with the ♠Q, they must play a ♥ for us and we can then take the ♥ finesse.

Note: One of the dangers of throwing an opponent on lead, hoping for an end play, is in some situations they may have a large number of winners in another suit and we may not get a chance at our finesse. This is a danger when we do not have an exact count on the hand.



Conclusion

As a declarer we are always looking for ways to avoid taking a finesse. This is especially true when we have information that leads us to believe that the finesse is failing. The end play is a useful tool for forcing the opponents to lead to you, instead of you leading to them (often the side that gets to play last has an advantage). You should look for ways to make use of the end play in notrump contracts just as you do in suit contracts.