

Trump promotion

As a defender gaining a trick by ruffing can often be the difference between declarer making or losing their contract. Occasionally the situation arises when partner leads a suit in which both you and declarer are void which can lead to one of your trumps being promoted from a losing card to a winning one :

	J82	
	87	
	AQJ104	
	Q76	
10754		A96
1062		J3
9865		32
92		AKJ1083
	KQ3	
	AKQ954	
	K7	
	54	

Love all
Dealer North

North	East	South	West
Pass	1C	X	Pass
2D	Pass	3H	Pass
4H	All pass		

With such a good suit South should make a take out double in the first instance rather than overcalling a number of hearts.

With a passed hand North can afford to jump to 2D in response with a good suit knowing their hand is limited to less than opening points in contrast to a 1D bid which can be made on an absolute minimum as it is a forced response.

South can afford to bid their suit strongly promising a suit that is virtually self sufficient and North raises to game.

The 9C lead from West to partner's suit starts the defence and on the third round of clubs from East declarer is fixed. If they ruff low then West can over ruff and if they ruff with an honour (A,K or Q) then West discards and will eventually make the 10H (now promoted). With 3 tricks from partner this will defeat the contract. Note that any other continuation from East will allow declarer to gain the lead and draw trumps without loss and make the contract.

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A less common variation and therefore perhaps less easily recognised form of promotion occurred recently:

Thursday 24th May Ngaio Pairs Board 11

	AJ8	
	954	
	J1083	
	986	
10876		K92
K102		7
K765		Q94
74		AQJ1053
	Q43	
	AQJ863	
	A2	
	K2	

Dealer South
Game all

North	East	South	West
		1H	Pass
1NT	2C	3H	All pass

With 16 points and a good 6 card suit South makes the strongly invitational bid of 3H. North, albeit with 3 card support, has no more than promised (6 points from a 6-9 point range) and with a balanced hand and too many losers wisely declines the invitation to game.

On the 7C lead East wins with the Ace, declarer following with the 2. East knows the lead must be a singleton or a small doubleton (West would have lead KC if they held it). Hoping for the former East continues with the QC. This is a lead directing card telling partner, if they ruff, to return a higher ranked suit i.e. spades. If East held the AD the correct return would have been the 3C asking for the lower ranked suit (discounting hearts as the trump suit). Note this cannot cost by giving declarer a cheap club trick for if they hold 3 clubs to the K then West has a singleton and will be ruffing.

South wins the KC and notes that with just one loser in each of the side suits the contract is safe as long as trump losers are kept to one. Fearing the possibility of a trump promotion the best line is crossing to dummy with the Ace of spades. Finessing the K to avoid a spade loser is an illusion as regardless of who holds the King there will always be a spade loser (unless West holds K doubleton spade which gives East 11 black cards-possible but against the odds).

A heart from dummy loses to West's K. Having noted the lead directing QC, West returns a spade to the K and the JC fixes declarer. West will win the 10H sooner or later.

What actually happened at the table is that East won KS at trick 3 and led the JC and declarer ruffed with the J (best).

When declarer ruffs with a small trump it will usually pay to over-ruff if you are able to do so.

The position is different here when declarer ruffs with an honour, for the principle of promotion comes into operation. The fact that declarer has played a high trump promotes every lower trump in the defenders' hands by one step in rank.

This advantage is dissipated if you over-ruff with an honour card of your own. It is normally correct to refuse to over-ruff when declarer ruffs high and this is the case here.

West must refuse to over-ruff with the K for if they do then declarer will regain the lead and draw the remaining trumps without further loss. If West discards instead the defenders will eventually come to 2 heart tricks instead of one.

Note, it is to no avail if declarer discards a losing diamond on the JC for a fourth club will be led and West will still make 2 trump tricks.