

Endplay – Throw-In Technique

An endplay (also throw-in), in bridge and similar games, is a tactical play where a defender is put on lead at a strategic moment, and then has to make a play that loses one or more tricks. Most commonly the losing play either constitutes a free finesse, or else it gives declarer a ruff and discard.

There are two main methods of gaining ONE EXTRA trick in a borderline contract. These are known as 'elimination play' and 'squeezes'. Both techniques require the ability to plan ahead and plot your way through the minefield of the difficult contract. Whenever you are short of just one trick it is usually possible to make your contract,

This is unless the defenders are able to cash enough tricks to stop you from the outset. Success demands the ability to appreciate in advance the problem(s) posed by a particular hand and it is simply not good enough to play out the cards and hope for the best.

How to recognise an end play

1. Consider the objective – count your tricks and losers – usually 1 loser for a throw-in
2. Recognise the suit better led by a single or either opponent
3. Identify and exit card
4. Make an elimination
5. Play the exit card

Usually the technique requires:-

- Play safe suits
- Leave the doubtful suit
- Strip the rest of the hand and lose your losers
- Balance up the hand to make it even
- Exiting to one of the defenders to force them into making an advantageous return.

This is different from ROUTINE play which requires you to play and set up the iffy suits before the safe ones.

Plus you must play the cards in the right order

Key to bidding commentary

F1	Forcing for 1 round	AC	Advance cue bid – may be a suit
FG	Forcing to game	CB	Cue bid
WB	Waiting bid	ST	Slam try
SF	Forcing to slam	RB	Reverse bid
OK	OK - go on then		

Example 1 Simple throw-in – either opponent

North	D	N	E	S	W	South
♠	KQ984	1S	P	2NT*/3D* F1/FG	P	♠ A10782
♥	K93	4C FG	P	4D SF	P	♥ A104
♦	Q73	4H/4NT WB	P	6S OK	P	♦ AK3
♣	A4	P	P			♣ 76
		LEAD	KC			

The first thought is if I play my cards from the top I will lose one heart and one club

Further analysis

- I have 11 tricks and only need one more – where? -ve
- I have mirror shape in both hands -ve
- I have no long suit for discards -ve
- **AK♥** honours are divided -ve/+ve
- The ♥ have good intermediates – showing the value of 9/10 +ve
- The hand is evened up already +ve
- I have an exit card in a small ♣ +ve

If the missing heart honours QJ are split between both hands then it may be possible to have one defender play the ♥ suit. Then finesse the other defender for the other heart (restricted choice). This should be at least 50% chance – which is better than no chance at all.

So the technique for this end play is

Lead suit	Take the lead club with A
Trumps	On this hand take all the oppo trumps out – leaving you with at least one in each hand
Play safe suit	Take out the diamonds
Strip the hand	No need
Even up	No need it is even already
Play exit card	Play the spare club
Defender is end played	Hopefully, defender will lead a H or give you a ruff and discard Your plan is to finesse the other opp for the other H honour

Note that the best chance for the defence is for whoever wins the honour must lead the heart honour - this seems counter intuitive - but it may make the declarer think they have both honours in the same hand. If with both QJ it is better to lead the J. The defence have SHIFTED the certainty of declarer’s plan and declarer may guess wrong.

For example how declarer would play the hand of Q♥ lead

The opening lead is frequently the determining factor in the decision to attempt the elimination play.

Example 2:- Throw-in with a Tenace – with a specific opponent

West	W	N	E	S	East D
♠ J3			1C	P	♠ A
♥ AK7	1D/2C F1	P	4D/3D FG/AC	P	♥ Q4
♦ 9764	4H CB/ST	P	4S CB/SF	P	♦ AQ83
♣ KJ82	6C OK	P	P	P	♣ AQ10764
LEAD		K2/xC			

BIDDING

- As W - Do not bid 2NT as that is 'hog' bidding especially when you have a 4-card fit in first suit
- Slower shows – fast arrival is weaker

First thought – EEEEEK - I have a lot of diamond losers – this is a problem

big -ve

Further analysis

- There are good trumps +ve
- I have a relatively long suit in H and can throw a D loser away +ve
- I have S shortage +ve
- A losing D finesse will lead to 2 D losers -ve
- Can see a throw-in card JS or xD +ve

So 2 different ways to play depending on the lead

KS lead from S

- We assume that the lead is from KQ

Lead suit	Take the lead club with A
Trumps	On this hand take all the oppo trumps out – leaving you with at least one in each hand
Play safe suit	Play the AS
Strip the hand	Play Hs ending in dummy
Even up	Play the last H and throw a D on it
Play exit card	Play the JS and discard the low D - QS will take it - evening up the hands
Defender is endplayed	Hopefully defender will lead a D into tenace or give you a ruff and discard Your plan is to finesse the other opp for the other D honour.

Any other lead from S

- Usual lead is a trump

suit	Take the lead with any winner in declarer's hand
Manage your entries	Take your AS to unblock
trumps	On this hand take 1/2 rounds of trumps ending in dummy leaving 2 in each hand
Play safe suit	Play the JS and ruff it
Strip the hand	playing 2 round Hs using Q and then ending in dummy
Even up	Play the last H and throw a D on it
Play exit card	Play xD and play low or cover anything that N plays leaving you with tenace of AQ or A8
Defender is endplayed	Hopefully S will lead a D into tenace or give you a ruff and a discard

The only other reasonable option on this hand is to play for the Kx outside or J10 doubleton. The full deal shows that playing for a doubleton or K on side would have worked but this is a 50% chance (only do this if you need 13 tricks) when the elimination is 100% for 12 tricks.

Board 1 - Simple End Play - either opponent					
		North D			
		♠	KQ984		
		♥	K93		
		♦	Q73		
		♣	A4		
West		W	N	E	S
♠	3		1S	P	2NT*13D*
♥	J872	P	4D/4C	P	4D
♦	1094	P	4H/4NT	P	6S
♣	J9852	P	P	P	
		South			
		♠	A10782		
		♥	A104		
		♦	AK3		
		♣	76		
		East			
		♠	J5		
		♥	Q65		
		♦	J965		
		♣	KQ103		

Board 2 - Throw in with a tenace - specific opponent					
		North			
		♠	109843		
		♥	J9532		
		♦	J105		
		♣	-		
West		W	N	E	S
♠	J3			1C	P
♥	AK7	1D/2C	P	4D/3D	P
♦	9764	4H	P	4S	P
♣	KJ82	6C	P	P	P
		South			
		♠	KQ762		
		♥	1086		
		♦	K2		
		♣	953		
		East D			
		♠	A		
		♥	Q4		
		♦	AQ83		
		♣	AQ10764		

General Defence to a throw-in play

The only solution is counting and trying to suss out what is going on and how it will happen.

- Look for a potential tenace (AQ, KJ) sitting over declarer – signal to partner to lead it quickly as you may get end-played.
- If declarer draws trumps and starts to eliminate/ruff one or more poor suits – watch out
- If you have a high card (maybe disclosed by the lead) in a side suit they may throw you in to lead something that will hurt you or your partner
- **Only if you are sure** that there is going to be a throw-in, try to discard the throw-in card
- If it is partner then try to identify the suit and retain the higher cards
- **CARE** – If it is only a ruffing play, throwing a high card may give declarer an extra trick
- Count the tricks for defence and declarer
- Keep playing against good players
- Read ‘Killing Defence I and II’ by Hugh Kelsey