

## Fast Losers verses Slow Losers

Before you decide whether to draw trumps or not, consult your **PLAN**. You need to decide how many fast losers, and how many slow losers you have. Remember that a **fast loser** is one that the opponents can take as soon as they get the lead. A **slow loser** is one that they can't take before they give the lead back to you.

When we are declarer, we've all learned the importance of counting our losers in a suit contract. Equally important is determining whether those losers are **fast losers** or **slow losers**. This knowledge can affect your choice of which suit to play first. As a first example, you, as South, end up as declarer in a contract of 4♠ on the deal shown below:

	♠ 9 7 4 2	
	♥ K 5 3	
	♦ Q J 6	
♠ A K	♣ J 7 4	♠ 6
♥ Q J T 8		♥ 9 7 2
♦ 9 7 4 2		♦ A T 8 5
♣ 9 8 5	♠ Q J T 8 5 3	♣ Q T 6 3 2
	♥ A 6 4	
	♦ K 3	
	♣ A K	

What is your plan to make this contract after West leads the Q♥?

Counting losers, you see you have four – two ♠s, one ♥, one ♦. One too many.

The defenders can cash their ♠ A K and the A♦ whenever they get the lead, so these are called fast losers. The ♥ loser, however, is slow for the moment, but slow losers can become fast losers once declarer's winners in the suit are gone. West's lead has made your slow ♥ loser only one loss of the lead away from becoming a fast loser. This one loser must be eliminated before this happens.

Notice the lopsided ♦ suit with dummy having three cards while declarer has two. So, we can drive out the A♦ to promote two ♦ tricks. Then a loser can be discarded on dummy's third ♦, and that discard obviously must be a ♥ loser, since the other three are unavoidable.

If we play even one trump before driving out the A♦, the opponents get in to continue leading ♥s, making our loser in that suit fast - that is, the defenders can cash a ♥ whenever East wins the A♦.

Therefore, our plan must be to win the opening lead in hand, saving our K♥ as a later entry to dummy, and lead the K♦ immediately. If the opponents duck the first ♦ lead, then lead another ♦. The defenders

can take their ace and when they lead another ♥, your king in dummy allows you the critical entry to cash the third ♦ and pitch your ♥ loser.

Now you can lead trumps and claim.

In our second example, you are declarer in a contract of 3♠, after West leads the Q♦ on the deal shown below:

	♠ Q 8 6 5	
	♥ Q 6 5	
	♦ A K 5 2	
♠ A 2	♣ 6 3	♠ 9 4
♥ K 9 8 2		♥ T 7 4 3
♦ Q J T 9		♦ 6 4
♣ 9 7 4	♠ K J T 7 3	♣ A K 8 5 2
	♥ A J	
	♦ 8 7 3	
	♣ Q J T	

What is your plan? You can count three fast losers – the top trump and two high ♣s – and two slow losers – one in each of the red suits.

Again, one of these losers must be eliminated. We can't do anything about the black suit losers. For the ♥ loser, we might consider taking the ♥ finesse – in theory a 50% chance of eliminating that loser. For the ♦ loser, we might notice the Q♥ in dummy, and say to ourselves – no problem, even if the ♥ finesse loses, the Q♥ in dummy will then be good and can be used to pitch the ♦ loser from our hand.

Is there a problem with this plan? Yes, indeed. We won't be able to get the timing and entries working successfully to implement that plan.

If we finesse in ♥s and lose to West, we must still unblock the A♥ from our hand before we can discard on dummy's Q♥. But by that time the defenders will have knocked out both our top ♦s from dummy and we have no other entry to get there.

Can you see the solution?

Don't take the ♥ finesse! Immediately, after winning the opening lead with the A♦ in dummy, lead a ♥ to the ace in your hand, then lead the J♥ back, not caring which opponent wins. The defenders can win this trick, but now you still have the K♦ in dummy to reach your now good Q♥ to discard your ♦ loser from hand.

**Summary:** Making a contract often requires us to work to set up winners in dummy to provide a place to discard losers. When doing this work, we must **consider fast and slow losers, entries and timing.**