

Safety Play

Taking a **SAFETY PLAY** is to ensure one's contract against the worst possible distribution of the opponents' cards.

Let's see this play in action:

The contract is 6 spades.

	9 8 7 6	
J		Q 10 3 2
	A K 5 4	

There are no tricks to be lost in the other suits, and there are entries in both hands.

It is obvious that one trick must be lost in this trump suit in any event. If the suit breaks 3-2, only one trick will be lost no matter which hand holds the outstanding honours. The Ace is played and if no honour appears on the first trick there is no safety play. Your only hope is that neither player held Q J 10 X originally.

If, however, West drops the Q, J or 10 on the first play, a small trump to dummy's 9 must be played. If West originally held a doubleton Q J, nothing will be lost since declarer's King will clear the suit. On the other hand, if West shows out, East's 10 will take the trick but a finesse to capture both of East's remaining trumps may later be made when dummy is re-entered.

In the next example, again the contract is 6 spades, in both matchpoints and teams.

♠ A Q 5 4
♠ 10 9 8 7 6

Assuming all the other cards in the North South hands are high with entries to both hands, playing in a team there can be no question how this trump suit should be attacked. Declarer is not interested in guessing where the adverse trump lie, nor is he particularly interested in whether he can gain another 30 points for making 7. It should be apparent from the above that if the K J x are in the East hand, 6 spades cannot be made by any line of play. Therefore, declarer should always play the ace from dummy first; then after entering his own hand he should lead up to the queen. This should guarantee the contract in every case where the contract is makeable. If West holds two spades to the King he will still only make 6 since he chose not to finesse. However, if East holds a singleton King he will make 7 since the J x x in West hand can now be finessed. In the case of club bridge, playing matchpoints, declarer may decide to gamble against the field. If he decides to make the safety play, he is risking a trick if the K x or K x x happen to be in the West hand. Against this possibility he must calculate his chances of going down and getting a minus score by misguessing the location of the King and Jack. For example, if the King, Jack, were doubleton in East's hand declarer decided to finesse the King and it lost what would he decide to do on the next play? Finesse the Jack or play for the drop? It may be wise to make a comparison. After the first play, when the King loses, the matchpoint player still must struggle to make his contract, however before the second play, the declarer using the safety play already has his contract assured.

Another example:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	1♠
Pass	2♦	3♦	Pass
Pass	4♠		

	♠ A Q 10 9 ♥ A J x x ♦ A x x ♣ A J x	
♠ x x ♥ 10 x x x ♦ x ♣ x x x x x x	Contract: 4 Spades Declarer: South	♠ K J x ♥ x x ♦ K 10 9 x x x x ♣ x
	♠ x x x x ♥ K Q x ♦ Q J x ♣ K Q 10	

West leads a diamond and declarer South evaluates a good contract - **4 Hearts, 3 Clubs** at least **1 Diamond** and **2+ Spades**. But what happens if declarer gets greedy, ducking the first trick hoping the ♦Q will win a trick? East wins the ♦K, returning a diamond which West ruffs with a low spade. Declarer must still lose 2 more spade tricks, the ♠K and ♠J going down 1. East holding both spade tenaces seems unlikely - normally a 26 percent chance, yet the sombre result speaks for itself.

Let's try again. Playing Matchpoints or IMP Team scoring, South should instead make a Safety Play. Win the ♦A, cash the ♠A, cross to declarer's ♣K, then play a low spade to Dummy. While declarer might lose **1 Diamond** and **2 Spades**, the contract is safe when the suits and trump tenaces break poorly.

Here's another tip - when you are declarer with 6 or more cards in a side suit and an opponent leads the suit, be wary of trying a finesse in your declarer hand. One of the opponents may hold a singleton and if the finesse fails, it could result in a two or more trick loss (rather than just one if you won with the Ace in dummy)