CHERISHING YOUR ENTRIES by Maritha Pottenger

As Declarer, one must constantly be aware of entries, and strive to use judiciously the entries that exist, often working to create more entries (particularly in the hand that has fewer of them). The primary tools for creating and maintaining entries are (1) ducking; (2) unblocking or overtaking; and (3) jettison plays.

When developing a long suit in a hand with few entries, ducking one round completely is often essential. For example AKxxxx (with no outside entry) opposite xx. Duck one round completely. Then play Ace, King and hope the suit breaks 3-2. Even worse: AQxxxx opp xx. Duck the 1st round completely. Then play to queen —hoping suit breaks 3-2 AND the King is onsides. Similarly, AQ10xx opposite Jx. Play the Jack. If it is covered by the King, DUCK. Then play Ace, queen, etc. That way you get 4 tricks even if King is doubleton and 9xxx is on the right. (If you cover King and the suit is 4-2, you may get only 3 tricks.) Another example: KQJxx (with ONE outside entry) opposite xx. DUCK 1st round completely. Then play to King and force out Ace. You have the ONE entry to get back to suit. (1st duck is guarding against the likely 4-2 break.) This is to make 3 tricks likely. If you only need 2 tricks, play King 1st round.

Even when you did not "have" to lose a trick in the suit, ducking one round may be essential due to lack of entries. When you are setting up a 5 card suit in dummy (in which you have two cards) and dummy has only ONE outside entry, it is probably best to duck the 1st round completely. Then play Ace, King and trump one round (suit is likely to break 4-2). You return with the ONE outside entry to cash the 5th (good) card in that suit. Similarly, if you have a 6-card suit in dummy opposite a singleton in your hand and dummy has only ONE outside entry and ONE trump entry, you should probably duck the 1st round of the 6-card suit. Get to dummy with a trump and trump the second round of the 6-card suit. Pull trumps. Use your one entry to get back to dummy and NOW play the Ace and King in the side suit. You should get 4 tricks in the suit.

Sometimes a dearth of entries requires overtaking a card. If, for example, you hold KQ opposite A98xx in a suit and dummy has only ONE outside entry, the percentage play is to play King and OVERTAKE queen with the Ace. (If suit is 3-3, it doesn't matter how you play it. If suit is 4-2 and EITHER the 10 or the Jack is doubleton, you can now use the 9 to force out the other honor and still have your ONE outside entry to get back to the suit.) In other cases, you may overtake (giving up a trick) because the extra entry allows you to take a key finesse (which gives 2, 3, or 4 tricks in return).

When you can take a trick in your hand or dummy, consider where you need to retain an entry for later in the hand (usually to cash long-suit winners). Preserve that entry! **You can develop low spot cards into entries if you play the suit carefully**! For example, suppose you have A1074 opposite KQ62 in dummy, and need 3 entries to dummy for other key finesses. You should play the 7 over to the King (or Queen) for the 1st round of the suit. Next time, play the Ace (and the 2). If the suit breaks 3-2, you can play the 10 to the King (or Queen) & 4 to the 6 on the 4th round of the suit!

Sometimes you give up a trick you might not have had to lose in order to create an entry. For example, holding AQx opposite Jx, if you *must* create an entry to the dummy, try playing the Queen from your hand. Similarly, holding AKJxxx opposite 10xx, if you *must* create an entry to dummy, play the Jack from your hand.

When **unblocking**, you play an unusually high card from one hand in order to create (or save) an entry in the other hand. A **jettison** play is when you discard a card (usually an honor) in order to unblock. An unblocking example: QJ10x J98 QJ9 10xx opposite xx K62 AK AQJxxx with the lead of the 5 of hearts to 8 and Ace. You must unblock with King! (Rule of 11 ensures that queen is on your left and you need a heart entry for the

diamond finesse.) If you have AKQJ1098x A void AQ10x opposite 2 KQJxx Axxx xxx and the lead is the King of diamonds, take the Ace and **jettison** your Ace of hearts. Then play KQJ of hearts, discarding clubs.