

Strip and End Play

It sounds slightly salacious but it is a bread and butter play by advanced and expert bridge players. It doesn't have to be just for them, however. The basic strip and end play is much easier than most intermediates think. It's principally used when there's no other way to make your contract or when making a contract depends on a 50% finesse or other improbable distributions.

Here's a hand that illustrates the technique:

Dealer: South

Vul: Both

Lead: ♥A

North

♠A 5

♥6

♦K 10 6 5 3 2

♣10 5 4 3

West

♠9 8 4

♥A K Q J 4

♦9

♣J 9 8 2

East

♠K J 10 7 6 2

♥9 8 3 2

♦J 7

♣6

South

♠Q 3

♥10 7 5

♦A Q 8 4

♣A K Q 7

Bidding:

West

1♥⁽¹⁾

3♠⁽⁴⁾

Dbf⁽⁸⁾

North

2♦

4♦⁽⁵⁾

All Pass

East

2♠⁽²⁾

4♥⁽⁶⁾

South

1♦

3♣⁽³⁾

5♦⁽⁷⁾

Making 5 for +750

1. West has a perfect overcall. She plays 1-level overcalls from 7-17 points and a good 5+ card suit.

2. East has a known 9-card fit in hearts and only 5 HCP's. The Law of Total Tricks would guide you to a response of 3♥. The jump doesn't show an invitational hand like it would if West were the opener. A jump of the overcaller's suit shows weakness and a combined trump holding equal to the number of tricks his bid requires. It also has the effect of hampering North/South's communications. Here, however, East makes an ill advised attempt to improve the situation by bidding his spades at the 1-level.
3. South holds a two suited hand and takes the opportunity to show the second suit at the 2-level, thanks to East's 1 over 1 bid.
4. West doesn't know about her partner's hearts so she supports spades. She knows they have at least 8 spades between them because East bid them over North's 2♦ response. All new suits in competition should be 5+ cards in length.
5. Spurred on by the double fit in diamonds and clubs, North raises to 4♦. The Law of Total tricks protects to the known 10+ card diamond fit.
6. East finally gets around to showing the heart support but now it doesn't show the number of hearts, as it would have had he jumped to 3♥ on his first bid. It's the best he can do now to catch up.
7. South raises diamonds to the 5-level. At this vulnerability 5♦ could be disastrous. Those hearts and spades were bid by the opponents and represent a 3-trick set in themselves. But when the auction gets competitive like this one has, we bridge players sometimes throw caution to the wind. I don't recommend it but I'm guilty of it myself on occasion 😊
8. West is also looking at a double fit; here its spades and hearts. She convinces herself that she can see at least 3 tricks and doubles. The good news for West is that every trick she sets them is worth

between 200 and 300 points. The bad news is that if the contract succeeds, it is worth a top board.

There was a lot of busy bidding in this auction – probably too much. Had East bid 3♥ originally West would probably be declaring at 4♥.

After West takes the ♥A she shifts to a spade, partner's suit. South counts 3 losers: 1 spade, 1 heart and 1 club if the clubs break worse than 3-2. The 3-2 break carries a 68% probability. There is a way to increase that probability to 100% by using the strip and end play technique.

The overall strategy is to throw the opponents into the lead at a time where they must either lead the problem club suit themselves, or lead another suit that will give you a ruff and discard. Either way you make the contract. There is a little preparation required before the throw in, however.

First take the spade with the ♠A, not because you think East has the ♠K but because you need a loser in spades with which to throw in the opponents later if the end play is needed. Then draw two rounds of trump and test the clubs, because if they break 3-2, you don't have to go through all this trouble. You get the bad news on the second club so you return to setting up the end play by stripping the South hand of hearts. That will eliminate the possibility of the opponents leading a heart when they are thrown in and forcing you to ruff rather than discard the club. The stripping is done by ruffing two hearts in the dummy using the trump suit for transportation. To be more efficient you could have ruffed the hearts while drawing the 3 outstanding trump, since both East and West were bidding hearts.

You are now ready to throw the opponents into the lead by playing a spade. East will win with the ♠K and the hands will look like this:

North



	♦K ♣10 5	
West		East
♠		♠J 10 7
♥K Q		♥9
♦		♦
♣J 9		♣
	South	
	♠	
	♥	
	♦8 4	
	♣Q 7	

The lead is with East. Whether he leads a spade or a heart, South will discard the ♣7 and ruff with the ♦K in the dummy. He then has two trumps and the good ♣Q to complete his 11 tricks. Even if West had the ♠K and she had the lead at this point, she could either lead a heart to the same effect or a club, making the declarer's ♣Q and ♣10 good.

The strip and end play is not an exotic technique for experts only. We all can use this simple device for improving our chances of making out contracts.