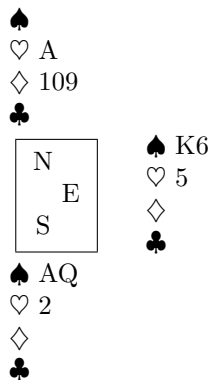


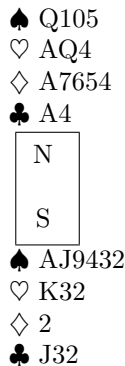
The trump coup

Of all the tools declarer has available, the trump coup is among the rarest and most delicate. Like flying pigs, quantum computing, and a three-way with Beyoncé and Jessica Alba, a naturally occurring trump coup is something most of us will never see. The situation where it arises is simple enough: lacking enough trumps to take a finesse, we use another suit to take the finesse for us. A trump coup is more like a squeeze than an endplay: after stripping an opponent of safe exit cards, we force him to play a trump that might otherwise have won a trick. The endposition looks something like the following (spades are trump, and West is out of them):



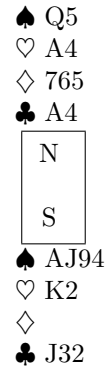
We must win all three tricks, and have the lead in our own hand. When we lead a heart to the ♥A and a diamond off dummy, East is forced to ruff, effectively finessing his ♠K, even though the dummy has no trumps remaining!

The easy part is this last step: in practice, getting down to the above position is the hard part. Let's see an example:

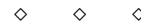


The contract is 6♠ by South, and West leads the ♦K; we win the ♦A, and ruff a second diamond in hand (this will be important later), East signalling high low. We had better figure out whether or not

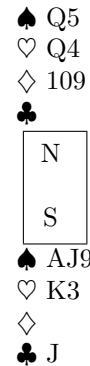
spades are breaking: after a heart to the queen, we run the ♠10, but West discards a diamond: we are down to



What now? (Stop: before you keep reading, see if you can work out where this is going.)



If we use dummy's remaining trumps to finesse the ♠K, then we won't have any trumps left in the dummy to ruff a club. So we ruff a diamond back to hand, play a club to the ace, and exit a club, leaving



Suppose East wins and returns a heart. We win in hand, ruff our last club, and take a second spade finesse. Now, assuming East has a heart remaining, we cash our last heart and play a diamond off the board, completing the coup. The position with three cards to play is (nearly) identical to the example endposition above.

In this hand, declarer must hope for the right distribution: otherwise there is no way to make the contract. Ruffing diamonds was necessary to shorten declarer's trumps: declarer must come down to the same distribution as East for the coup to work.