

4 - 4 fit or 5 - 3?

Most bridge players look for a 4 - 4 fit wherever possible.

The 4 - 4 fit may benefit by being able to ruff twice in either hand, while retaining 4 trumps in the other. This can be useful at any level.

If both hands hold 4 trumps the odds are about 2 in 3 that the opponents trumps will split 3 - 2. Either hand can trump 1 – 3 times with a short suit facing a long suit in partners hand. If the trump suit is 5 - 3 you must trump in the hand with the short trumps to gain extra tricks. With only 3 trumps that hand holds 10 cards in the other 3 suits and is less likely to have a short suit.

Consider this hand :

♠ AK765

♥ KJT5

♦ A72

♣ 8

♠ Q98

♥ AQ32

♦ 543

♣ A92

Playing in 4S with good breaks, you will make 5S + 4H + 1D + 1C = 11 tricks.

Although you can ruff clubs in the North hand, it gains no tricks. You were always going to make those long spades.

Now, look what happens in 4H. You can ruff 2 clubs in the North hand and still enjoy the 5 spades.

On the 4th and 5th spades, you will pitch two diamonds. 4H + 2ruffs + 5S + 1D + 1C = 13 tricks.

For this reason, after a 1S opening, South will still seek a heart fit. If it doesn't materialize, he can always revert to 4S. Here, the auction will go :-

1S 2C

2H 4H

Another hand to demonstrate the superior fit :

		♠ A K 9 7	
		♥ A K 10 9 7	
		♦ 3	
		♣ 8 7 5	
♠ 4			♠ 6 5 3 2
♥ 8 6 5 2			♥ 3
♦ K J 10 4			♦ 9 8 7 6 5
♣ J 10 9 2			♣ K Q 4
		♠ Q J 10 8	
		♥ Q J 4	
		♦ A Q 2	
		♣ A 6 3	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♥	Pass	?

Auction: South, intending to play some number of hearts, marks time with a 1♠ response. After the jump raise, things change! Should South pass or bid 6♠? Key points: Extra trump tricks usually come by ruffing in the short hand, i.e., the hand with the least number of trumps. Ruffing in the long hand prevents losers, but rarely creates extra winners.

Consider 6♠ versus 6♥. With spades as trump, there are 13 tricks by ruffing two diamonds in dummy. With hearts as trump, there are only 11 winners — the only ruffs available are in the long hand.

Faced with a choice between a 5-3 or 4-4 trump fit, the 4-4 fit is usually superior.

Reason: With equally divided trumps, either hand may become the short hand to create extra winners. With unevenly divided trumps, the short hand is preordained.