



Play & Learn

Pat Harrington

mrsbridge@embarqmail.com

Discards with a twist

Here are two deals for you to play as South, the declarer in 4♥.

Deal 1: West leads the ♣Q.

♠ Q 9 8 4
♥ Q J 10 3
♦ A J
♣ 8 5 2

♠ K 3
♥ K 9 7 6 4
♦ K Q 3
♣ A 7 3

This deal shows how important it is to identify fast and slow losers. South's losers are one spade (fast), one heart (fast) and two clubs (fast with the lead) — too many. One loser must be eliminated *before* losing the lead. West's opening lead puts pressure on declarer to make a good plan immediately.

Dummy provides a clue of sorts. A short suit in dummy is a clue that you might ruff losers in that suit but you have no diamond losers. Are you wishing you could trade dummy's doubleton diamond for a doubleton

club? In bridge, as in life, you have to play the cards you are dealt, but you can make your own wish come true on this deal!

There isn't a lot of risk in leading three rounds of diamonds before drawing trumps. The defenders' eight diamonds would have to split 6-2 or worse to hurt you and that isn't very likely. Win the ♣A and play the ♦3 to the ace and overtake the ♦J. When you cash the third diamond, discard a club from dummy, and you have magically given dummy the doubleton you wanted. Now you have only three fast losers and can eventually ruff a club to make 10 tricks.

It's common to look at extra winners in dummy as a place to discard losers, but extra winners in declarer's hand can sometimes let you create a useful short suit in dummy.

Deal 2: West leads the ♠K.

♠ A 4 2
♥ K J 5 4
♦ 3
♣ K Q J 10 9

♠ 8 6 3
♥ Q 10 9 7 6 2
♦ A Q 7
♣ 5

South's losers are two spades (fast with the lead), one heart (fast), one club (fast) and two diamonds (slow). Three of these six losers must be eliminated. At first glance, the solution appears to be discarding losers on dummy's clubs after the ♣A is

driven out, but what about those four fast losers? When you give up the lead to the ♣A, East-West can set you by cashing two spades with the trump ace to come. There's a way to make your contract if you don't mind taking an extra risk. Again, you want to create a short suit in dummy that will change one of your fast losers to a slow loser. The play that could do that is the diamond finesse. Win the ♠A and lead the ♦3 to the queen. When the finesse wins, you cash the ♦A and discard a spade. You still have too many losers, but you now have time to draw trumps and set up clubs to make your contract. Unlike the first deal, you never have to ruff losers in dummy. They can be discarded on clubs. All you did is make it safe to lose the lead to prepare to do this.

Who knew? After the many times I've stressed avoiding *unnecessary* finesses, I'm telling you to finesse in a suit where you could have ruffed your losers. The key word, however, is *unnecessary*. On this deal, the diamond finesse was necessary to help you avoid a loser in another suit.

Let me ask you one last question to make sure you understood what we did here. Would you play the same way if West had led a club or a trump? Your spade losers would still be slow losers, so you wouldn't have too many fast losers and would have no reason to risk the diamond finesse. You'd try to draw trumps and discard on clubs instead. Your plan would differ depending on what your opponents do. □