

Play & Learn



Pat Harrington
mrsbridge@embarqmail.com

Finesse? What finesse?

Cover the East–West hands and plan the play as South on both deals below. West leads the ♥Q against 4♠ and East follows with the 3. Assume your only concern is making your contract.

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

South has four losers — two clubs and two diamonds. One loser must be avoided. What is the best plan to make your game?

Last month, we noted that we don't take a finesse simply because it's there to take. That is true of the diamond finesse. What is the danger in taking it? Think about what the defenders can do to hurt you if West wins the ♦K. The only way to reach dummy to finesse diamonds is to play a spade, leaving dummy with only one trump. Now do you see the danger?

West's heart lead is normal, but once you play diamonds, West could realize what you hope to do and return a spade after winning the ♦K.

You can get a diamond ruff and make 4♠ without taking a finesse. Before playing spades, deplete dummy

of diamonds. This guarantees being able to ruff a diamond loser and ensures the contract. Trade the ♥K for dummy's ♥6 and it's right to play for an overtrick. The extra dummy entry means you don't have lead trumps prematurely.

Contracts with a lot of issues to consider are the most difficult to plan. See how you manage the following deal. South is in 3♥. West leads the ♦Q, which you win in dummy.

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

South's potential losers are a spade and a diamond. Certain losers are two clubs and one heart. To make 3♥, your diamond loser must be eliminated. What's the best way to do it?

If you answered spade finesse, you have the right suit but not the best play. Again, consider what will happen if that finesse loses. West is likely to lead another diamond, which leaves you with five *fast* losers. You can't give up the lead again until you eliminate a loser but there is no way to do that. Dummy's ♠Q is now good, but how will you get there to use it?

The diamonds were dummy's only quick entries. Instead of finessing spades, promote the ♠Q by playing the ♠A and then the ♠J. West still wins the ♠K, but you are out of spades and can discard your third diamond on dummy's ♠Q before losing the lead again.

When should you draw trumps? Because you don't have the ♥A, you can't afford to lead trumps until you've set up the discard. If you let the opponents in before then, they will continue diamonds and you won't be able to let them in with the ♠K because they will cash their hard-earned diamond trick before you can discard your loser.

Entries are a consideration when taking a finesse. Many players don't plan far enough ahead to realize that entries could be a problem. Add entries to your list of things to consider when planning the play. Even when you have sufficient entries, it's wise to think about other alternatives before relying on a finesse to make your contract. □