

Play & Learn



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A better alternative

Cover the East–West hands and plan the play as South on both deals.

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

South is in 6NT. West leads the ♣10 and East follows low. In notrump, declarer counts winners: three clubs, four diamonds, two hearts, and two spades. One more trick must be developed. What are your options?

If you think the only chance to make 6NT is to play West for the ♥Q, you haven't looked closely enough. Your other option involves *length*. Between declarer and dummy, you see two four-card suits. You already planned on winning all four diamonds, but you counted only two

spade tricks. Might it be possible to win a third spade trick? It's true that the six spades held by East–West are more likely to split 4–2 than 3–3, but you can give yourself an extra chance to make your slam by testing spades *before* committing to the heart finesse.

Lose a spade early, while you can immediately regain the lead in all four suits. Diamonds split 4–2, so it's safe to run them before giving up a spade. (An unthinking opponent might discard a spade to help you). Then cash the top spades, watching to see how the suit splits. If North's last spade is good, cash it, discarding a heart. All you lose is one spade trick. If North's fourth spade isn't good, you still can finesse hearts as long as you saved an entry to your hand (South) to take that finesse.

On the next deal, South is in 3NT. West leads the ♠Q and continues leading spades if you hold up.

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

Winners are two spades, one heart, four diamonds and one club. You need another trick. How will you get it? You're catching on if you looked for

an alternative to finessing the ♣Q. The problem with the club finesse is that you have to use dummy's only entry — the ♦K — to take it. All's well when the finesse works, but on this deal, West wins the ♣K. The losing finesse made dummy's ♣J good, but you have no way to reach it. What's the solution? Instead of finessing clubs, promote them. Play the ♣A and then the ♣Q. If West wins the ♣K, you have the ♦K entry to cash dummy's ♣J and you make 3NT. The fact that a finesse is available is not reason enough to take it. In fact, when your plan involves taking a finesse, it's smart to ask yourself if there is a better alternative. □

► Upgrading Your Game

continued

couple of false starts. Several decades ago, when negative doubles were new, I began to think I'd never recognize one. But I had a patient mentor with a great sense of humor (and I'm so lucky to still be playing with Carol Mullins all these years later!) and eventually I learned. You will, too. □

