

# Play & Learn



Pat Harrington  
mrsbridge@embarqmail.com

## Which finesse?

Cover the East–West hands and plan South’s play in 6NT. West leads the ♣10 and East follows with the 5.

♠ K Q 8 ♥ 6 5 ♦ Q 9 8 3 ♣ A K 6 3	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	E			S		♠ 10 7 6 2 ♥ 10 8 7 4 2 ♦ J 7 4 ♣ 5	
	N											
W	E											
	S											
♠ 9 4 ♥ Q 9 3 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ 10 9 8 7 2		♠ A J 5 3 ♥ A K J ♦ A 5 2 ♣ Q J 4										

West	North	East	South
Pass	6NT	All Pass	2NT

Declarer counts winners in notrump: four clubs, one diamond, two hearts and four spades. You must develop one more trick to make 6NT. In notrump, your options for building needed tricks are high cards and length. The black suits provide four tricks each but no more, so your at-

## ► Upgrading Your Game

*continued*

That’s the only holding when your play matters, so play low. And if declarer holds A–J–10–x–x, he’d start by leading the queen anyway. If you play low smoothly, declarer might play the ace, hoping to drop your partner’s singleton king.

If you hear a bridge maxim, think about it. Be a savvy bridge consumer.

ention turns to the red suits. There are two possibilities for extra tricks: the ♥J and the ♦Q. Both cards have a chance of becoming good via a finesse. If one of the two finesses works, you will make 6NT. Does it matter which finesse you take first?

It might surprise you that the order does matter. You might think a finesse is a finesse, but there are different types of finesses. East must have the ♥Q for the finesse to work, and if it does, the opponents have no chance of gaining the lead. The diamond finesse is different in that it risks losing the lead even when it works. The right way to finesse diamonds is to lead toward the ♦Q, which has no higher card to protect it. That gives either defender the opportunity to win the ♦K. Even when West has the ♦K and your finesse works, West can gain the lead.

*When you need one of two finesses to work and one of those finesses allows the opponents to gain the lead even when it works, take that finesse first — provided that you can afford to lose the lead.* You can make 6NT if you lead toward the ♦Q early while you still have all suits stopped and before finessing hearts. West can win the ♦K but cannot hurt you. The ♦Q is your 12th trick and you no longer need the heart finesse — you’ll discard the ♥J on dummy’s last club. If you take the heart finesse first and West wins the queen, it’s too late to lead to the ♦Q because West will be only too happy to take the ♦K for

the setting trick. *Choosing to take the finesse that allows the opponents to gain the lead first gives you two tries to make your contract.*

Here’s a similar deal with a complication:

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

You play 6♥ as West on the lead of the ♣10. You have 11 tricks and need a successful finesse in diamonds or spades. You must play spades first, before you draw trumps. You hope North has the ♠K. If so, the queen will be your 12th trick (you discard the ♦Q on the ♠Q). You must keep the ♥Q in dummy to get to the good spade. If South has the ♠K, you can fall back on the diamond finesse.

Declarer doesn’t simply count winners or losers. Declarer should also consider entries, timing, and the opponents — their distribution, what their bidding has shown, and the plays they’ve made or might make. Have I convinced you yet that taking a little time to plan your play at trick one is necessary? □