

The Play of the cards – Tips for the improver

This is the second in our series devoted to **the finesse**. The following suit illustrates an extension of the principle of finessing the lowest honour first, established in last month's article:

AQ104

75

A finesse of the ten, a double finesse, will usually win most tricks. Of course, your plan for a particular hand may require you simply to make two tricks and then a finesse of the queen would be the correct play. Similarly, if you hold so many cards that you can achieve your aim to maximise the number of tricks with one finesse, for example,

(1) AQ10642
8753

(2) AKJ9
764

In (1) you lead low towards AQ and West plays the nine. Now your best chance is to finesse the queen, not the ten, which would gain only when West held all three outstanding cards. In (2) the normal play is to cash the ace and then finesse the jack, winning four tricks when you find West with Qxx. With a card fewer in the South hand it would be in order to take the deep finesse of the nine followed by a finesse of the jack. A finesse against two honours, such as KQ or QJ, is called a combination finesse:

(1) AJ10
872

(2) K1093
754

In (1) if a finesse of North's ten loses, South repeats the finesse and wins two tricks unless both missing honours are with East. There is therefore a 75% chance of winning two tricks. In (2) a finesse of the nine is followed by a finesse of the ten and there is just over a 60% chance of winning two tricks. If the North hand held the eight instead of the three, the percentage rises to just over 75%. Here are two more examples of combination finesses:

(1) AJ9
764

(2) Q103
852

As usual, declarer begins by finessing the lowest card. In (1) he finesses the nine and if this fetches the king or queen, there is a good chance the subsequent finesse of the jack will win. In (2) the chances of making just one trick by leading towards the ten are similar. In each case success depends on the combination of an even chance with a three to one chance, ie 37.5%. As mentioned in last month's article, the finesse is sometimes abused in that it is not always the best way of developing tricks. Take these two combinations:

(1) A75
QJ63

(2) AQ42
J3

In (1) if you lead the queen to finesse, you will win only two tricks when the opposing cards split 4-2 even if the king is on side. Playing low towards QJxx will win three tricks nearly 70% of the time. Similarly with (2), if you lead the jack or even small towards AQ, you will seldom win more than two tricks. Leading low towards Jx, if East has the king and plays it, you have established three tricks. If East has the king and ducks (eg holding Kxx), you may still win three tricks by ducking the next round and then playing the ace on the third round.

Dick Wheeler
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