

NORTH
WEST 6 Dealer
SOUTH

Bath Replays

34 Do not finesse

Board 6. Tuesday April 21, 2009.

It never ceases to amaze bridge teachers how long it takes beginners to master the simple concept of the finesse, which experienced players feel they have been doing since birth. It is also true that expert players take fewer finesses than normal mortals. Hand 6 on Tuesday 21st April is an excellent example, which came on the first round, before we had warmed up.

As East I was dealer and opened 1♠. This hand is too good for a weak two and I have a very safe rebid of 2♠. Partner, Andrew Parkes, looked at his 5 losers and bid 4NT, RKCB, my 5♣ showed one key card and Andrew put his cold partner into the cold slam:

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♠	All pass		

♠ K10
♥ 9874
♦ K7
♣ J8762
♣ Q6542
♥ A32
♦ AQJ9
♣ A
♠ AJ9873
♥ K5
♦ 86
♣ Q105
♠ -
♥ QJ106
♦ 105432
♣ K943

On seeing dummy the first reaction is that you need one of two finesses, which is a 75% chance, so it is a good slam to be in.

First what really happened:

South led ♥Q. Lazily I allowed this to run to ♥K. Next I cashed ♠A, which is technically correct as the odds favour the drop by 52% to 48%. When that did not work I played a Diamond to the Jack. That lost and I claimed conceding the ♠K. We recorded one down for an average. Remember this was the first round. "That will get worse," I observed as we moved to the next table.

Andrew pointed out that a better line would be to win the lead in dummy and lead ♠Q, playing the Ace whether or not the King appears. This does not gain in percentage terms but gives North the opportunity to cover and take the problem away.

Examination of the traveller at the end of the evening revealed the score had got worse. We had scored zero! Only one other pair had bid the slam, but 8 out of 13 declarers had made 12 tricks.

Now for the replay:

It is so much easier with time and 4 hands to look at. The correct line is to win ♥A and lead ♠Q, as Andrew suggested, playing the Ace whatever North does, so that the outstanding ♠K is the only loser we can afford. Now play a club to the Ace, heart to the King, ruff a club, ruff a heart and ruff the last club. To leave the position shown right.

Leading ♠6 from West leaves North with nowhere to go, being end-played in three suits.

Those declarers who took two finesses made their contract (the 75% line), those who took one did not (this is 76%) and those who took none made their contract with the satisfaction of knowing they had maximised their probability of success (88%) as well as getting a good score.

The finesse is a very useful means of developing extra tricks, but it is not the only tool in your kit.

♠ K
♥ 9
♦ K7
♣ J8
♠ 65
♥ -
♦ AQJ9
♣ -
♠ J987
♥ -
♦ 86
♣ -
♠ -
♥ J
♦ 10543
♣ 9

Phil Green
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