



The Finesse Part I

WHAT is there to say about this particular topic that isn't banal and obvious? Quite a lot, in fact. To start with, can you actually define what a finesse actually is? No? Well, the dictionary definition isn't exactly a model of clarity – here it is in all its glory:

The finesse: The attempt to gain power for lower ranking cards by taking advantage of the favourable position of higher ranking cards held by the opposition.

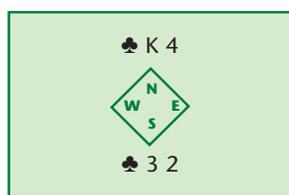
Hmmm. What that means is that there is a lot more to this than the everyday position that all textbooks use as the basis of all descriptions of the finesse:



This position is known to you all and requires only a brief description of the mechanism. The ♣A-Q holding is known as a 'tenace' (supposedly from the Spanish *tenaza*, meaning tongs or pincers) and it is axiomatic to lead up to a tenace and not away from it. Here, West is obliged to play before North (the tenace holder) after South leads the suit. Should West have the king of clubs he has no winning defence. Should East have the king of clubs, then the great dealer in the sky has smiled on

East-West and frowned on North-South. *C'est la vie.*

Anyway, the definition above means that the following layout also counts as a finesse:



Here the king of clubs will make a trick if West has the ace of clubs, always provided South takes the time and trouble to lead from his hand rather than from the North hand. True, there is no tenace position in this layout but, nonetheless, it still counts as a finesse.

So well are these positions known that players then abuse similar but crucially different layouts. For example, we have all seen this sort of butchery:



The only legitimate play for two tricks here is to hope that *West* has the king of

clubs. You can cash the ace of clubs and play up to the club queen, awaiting West's card. Some misguided players, though, deem it clever to lead and attempt to run the queen of clubs. It isn't. If West has the king of clubs, it's curtains. If East has it, he may well remember the adage 'Cover an honour with an honour' (a topic I intend to address in a later article, given indulgence by the editor) and he will place the king of clubs on the club queen, thus forcing the club ace and taking out two of the North-South high cards for one of the defenders. Against rational defence, leading the queen of clubs cannot gain.

Slightly more subtle is this layout:



How would you handle this suit for three tricks? It's time for a full deal.

Deal 1
South plays in 3NT.
West leads the ♠Q.

♠ A 5
 ♥ A K 6
 ♦ 8 7 5 2
 ♣ Q J 4 2

♠ K 3
 ♥ Q J 5
 ♦ A 9 6 3
 ♣ A 6 5 3

South plays in 3NT and West attacks in the suit where there is mutual shortage – spades. South can count two spades, three

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- These master points will be accepted and added to player records.
- The bridge will be played in line with EBU regulations and bye laws, thus affording all players the protection of playing within the jurisdiction of the EBU.

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NOTE: Any events licensed by another National Bridge Organisation will not be able to have master points credited to members' records save for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with whom the EBU have a reciprocal agreement.



hearts, one diamond and therefore needs three club tricks to fulfil his contract. So here we are, how should you play clubs? Many players, giving the matter little thought, would grab the ace of spades and would run the queen of clubs 'finessing through East'. But what is the point of that? Place the clubs in any way you like and you cannot avoid a club loser (assuming East-West defend accurately)

Now, admittedly, if clubs break 3-2 it doesn't matter what you do in the suit – running the queen of clubs will work equally as well as other lines. However, what if they break 4-1? This will happen over a quarter of the time so is not an idle question. If East has four clubs headed by the king then you will have two losers – as sure as eggs is eggs. But if West has four clubs . . . ?

Let's look at the full deal:

Deal 2
South plays in 3NT.
West leads the ♠Q.

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

Running the queen of clubs to West's king will spell defeat for declarer as there are now only ever two club tricks for North-South. Correct technique brings home the bacon. South should win the spade lead (in either hand, it doesn't matter on this deal) and should cash the ace of clubs (every now and again the king of clubs will drop singleton and that's game over). Here, everyone follows small so South continues with a small club to the jack of clubs. When that holds, South returns to the closed hand with the queen of hearts and plays another club, cooking West's goose. 3NT makes whenever clubs are 3-2, whenever the king of clubs is singleton and whenever West has the king of clubs. Leading the queen of clubs from dummy never makes the contract when cashing the ace of clubs does not.

Yes, this play is a finesse, but it's a finesse through West, not through East. □

Top Table



Tom Townsend

TOM TOWNSEND won the 1994 Junior European Teams Championship and followed this up with winning the Junior World Teams Championships in 1995. In his post-Junior days, Tom has won most of the national competitions at least once, and gained a silver medal in the World Open Bridge Teams at the 2008 Mind Sports Games. In 2012, he was in the England open team that qualified for the 2013 Bermuda Bowl and reached the quarter-finals in Bali.

When did you start playing bridge?

My parents got me playing some kind of three-handed version when I was about nine or ten.

How often do you play?

Most weekends and several longer tournaments a year, home or abroad. Abroad often means Poland, as Ewa (Kater) and our son Max still live in Warsaw. Mid-week action when I'm in London could be duplicate pairs at the Young Chelsea, a team-of-four match of some kind, or a few rubbers at TGR's.

Do you always play with the same partners / team-mates?

I am comfortable with a wide range of partners but tend to stick with one line-up for each season's major events. Having turned 40 I no longer expect my partners to remember vast reams of system. Qualities I rate more highly are solidarity, patience and (as they say often on the US golf tour) remaining in the present tense. You can't replay boards past but try telling some players that.

What do you do for a living?

Play bridge; write the *Daily Telegraph*

bridge column, Monday to Friday.

What are your favourite bridge books?

Reese and Bird (his monks series).

What are your hobbies?

Backgammon and sports betting.

What do you like and what would you change in bridge?

Bridge is the greatest game for many intrinsic and social reasons familiar to all players but I fear for the English tournament circuit. Are talented young card players likely to be attracted to contests which return around 10% of entry fees in prize-money? No. Entry fees are high regardless, and many events decline year on year in numbers and prestige. If we are to remain a major bridge nation the EBU must find a way to increase the appeal of its tournaments and offer better value. Easier said than done admittedly.

What's the bridge success (so far) closest to your heart?

The 1994 Junior European Championships. We overtook Denmark on the last match to snatch gold. My first major success and still the most exciting.

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The Finesse Part II

MY last article was about the simple finesse. This article continues the theme but extends the idea – a sort of ‘finesses with knobs on’. Let’s start by taking a look at a couple of very simple positions. Firstly we have the double finesse:



Here North has a sort of double tenace (an honour holding with two ‘holes’ in it or maybe you can think of it as a fork with three prongs). How should South play this combination? Well, the best play is to lead from the South hand and, when West plays a low card, play the ♣10. Now, three things may happen: the ♣10 may win the trick (which will happen if West has both the ♣K and ♣J), it may lose to the ♣K (which will happen if West has just the ♣J) or it may lose to the ♣J.

In the first case South must return to hand with another suit and play another card to the ♣Q, making three tricks in the suit. In the second case (where the ♣10 has forced the ♣K) there are two tricks in the suit set up in the dummy and no further finesse is necessary. In the third case South has to return to hand and play another club to the ♣Q, hoping that West has the ♣K.

It is worth noting that South will make three tricks about 25% of the time (when

West has both the ♣K and the ♣J) exactly two tricks 50% of the time (when the missing honours are split) and will make only the ♣A when East has both missing honours. For practical purposes, therefore, South will make at least two tricks about 75% of the time.

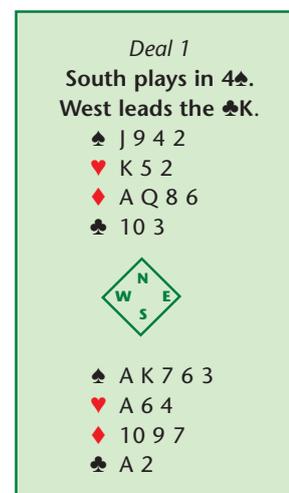
The following combination is similar but goes under the name of ‘combination finesse’:



You might like to think of the North holding as being an extended tenace as it doesn’t really conform to the exact definition of an ordinary tenace. Now, what are South’s chances in this suit? Well, the play is the same as for the double finesse, a crucial difference being that there is no chance of making three tricks. South can manufacture two tricks (no more) from this combination and this can be achieved 75% of the time by taking two finesses. To achieve this, South leads low to the ♣10 and expects it to lose. Once it has done so he then regains the lead in the South hand and finesses the ♣J, hoping and expecting it to win. If East has the ♣K-Q then South will lose two tricks, of course, but that would be unlucky. If West has the ♣K-Q then either the ♣10 will win or – perhaps

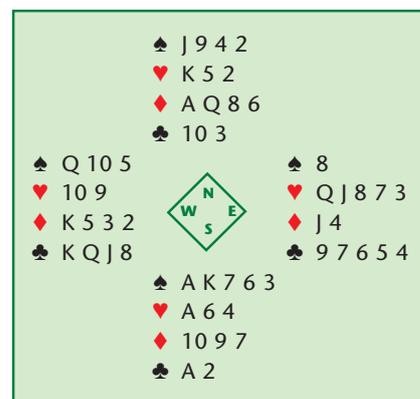
more likely – West will split his honours and no further finesse will be necessary.

It’s time to look at a simple deal:



South plays in 4♣ and West starts off with the ♣K. South wins with the ♣A and tries his luck with the ♣A-K, finding out that they are 3-1 and that West has a trump trick. What now?

Well, there is a possible heart loser and the diamonds to tackle. The best play is to run the ♦10 and if that loses, to run the ♦9 later. With luck the diamonds will become established for a heart discard and South will hold his losers to one spade, one diamond and one club. The full deal:



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As the cards lie, there is no defence. The ♦10 loses to the ♦J but the next diamond finesse succeeds and South can set up a discard for his third heart.

Here is another example, with a slight twist:

Deal 2
South plays in 3NT.
West leads the ♠Q.

♠	7 5 2
♥	K 9 4
♦	A J 10 7 3
♣	5 3

♠	A K
♥	A Q 5
♦	9 6 2
♣	Q J 7 6 2

You propel yourself into 3NT and West leads the ♠Q. Counting your tricks you see that you have two spades, three hearts and no clubs, meaning that you need four diamond tricks to swell the total to nine. Well, it's obvious (by which I mean that I hope it's obvious) that you have to take the combination diamond finesse. Be careful, though – exactly how should you play?

You win the spade lead and play a diamond – but which diamond? You are, of course, intending to finesse the diamond

into East, so should you lead a small one, or should you make use of the curse of Scotland (for the uninitiated, that's the ♦9)?

If you lead the ♦9 you will regret it. The full deal:

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

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

♠	A K		
♥	A Q 5		
♦	9 6 2		
♣	Q J 7 6 2		

The ♦9 is covered (perforce) by the ♦Q and ♦A and now East's ♦8 comes into the game. After this start you cannot make four diamond tricks and – anyway – the defenders will establish enough tricks to defeat you before you can get any more than two diamonds going.

A small diamond lead from South wins the day on this layout. You need split diamond honours (or both with West) but you don't need a 3-2 break. Now, class, pay attention, it's time for homework. What if West had held ♦K-8-5-4 and East the singleton ♦Q? Can you see that leading the ♦2 on the first round would still have worked? However – what would the follow-up in the suit have been? □

CAPTION COMPETITION



*It was only one down,
but they were vulnerable . . .*

THE winner of our February competition, with the caption above, is Graham Tenneson, Ashwell, Rutland who will receive an elegant bridge mug from our sponsors, Bridge and Golf Gifts Direct (see page 12). Other excellent captions were: *I don't know how he went off – looked frigid to me!* (Philip Wraight, Staveley); *She only had a small heart . . .* (Margaret Gibbon, Farnham); *We are all vulnerable now* (Gwen Beele, Willand, Devon); *Sad to think we will not be around for the Spring Congress!* (Bill Roberts, Thornton-Cleveleys); *The poor chap got caught in a backwash squeeze* (Michael Hill, London); *He didn't make it through the final heat* (Stephen Kennedy, Bexhill-on-Sea); *I tried to warn him about playing in the local heat, but would he listen?* (Steven Saskein, Stanmore); and *If you can't stand the heat, stay off the committee!* (Catherine Thorp, Ryde).

The cartoon for our new competition is below. Please send your bridgy captions (multiple entries accepted) to Caption Competition, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR or by e-mail to elena@ebu.co.uk not later than 20th April 2014. *Don't forget to include your full postal address!*



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The Finesse Part III

THE last two articles have been about finesses – why should this one be any different? This time, though, we are going to start with a deal and expand on a theme:

Deal 1

South plays in 4♥.
West leads the ♦9.

♠	A Q J 10 9
♥	A J 5
♦	K 4
♣	7 5 2

♠	3
♥	K Q 10 9 4
♦	10 8 3
♣	A J 4 3

North opens 1♠, East sticks in a non-vulnerable overcall of 2♦ and South ends up in 4♥. Dummy is decent but the nine of diamonds lead is not what South was hoping to see (well, to be accurate, the ♦K-x on table was not what South was hoping to see). East takes his ♦A-Q and switches to the ten of clubs. How are ten tricks to be made here?

Well, a count of tricks might help... South can see one spade, five hearts, one club and a diamond ruff on table. That's a total of eight. Should he rely on the spade finesse? Well, what use would that be? Suppose you play a spade to the ♠9 and it were to hold. What next? That would be nine tricks but where's the tenth? Also, do you really think West has the ♠K after the bidding and early play?

We need to think about this in a different way. Taking the 'normal' spade finesse gains us only one trick; we need more than that as we have three club losers we need to ditch.

Take a look at the full deal

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

The right line of play is to hope that East has the king of spades. We take the ace of clubs at trick three and immediately play a spade to the ace and lead the queen of spades. What can East do? When he plays the king we ruff, draw trumps ending on table and bin the losing clubs on dummy's long spades. This play (as you probably know) is called the 'ruffing finesse' and it is preferable to the ordinary finesse on this deal firstly because of the bidding and – more importantly – because it has the potential to generate more winners. Note that we do not even need the diamond ruff on table...

Preferring a ruffing finesse to a normal finesse is not always because of its potential to make more tricks. Take a look at this deal:

Deal 2

South plays in 4♥. West leads the ♣Q.

♠	A Q J 7
♥	K J 9
♦	8 7 5
♣	8 4 3

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

♠	5
♥	A Q 10 7 5 2
♦	J 6 2
♣	A K 6

South plays in a normal 4♥ and West leads the obvious queen of clubs. In retrospect, a low diamond lead would have been best for the defence but no one other than an escapee from a local institute would have found that one... South can see nine tricks on top (one spade, six hearts and two clubs). There are three obvious diamond losers and a slow club loser. Now, there are two possible ways of getting rid of a loser – declarer could play a spade to the jack (a 'normal' finesse) or could play the ace of spades and run the queen of spades, taking the ruffing finesse. Which line offers the better chances?

Well, suppose you draw a couple of trumps and play a spade to the jack. If it holds, you rack up your game bonus. If it fails, though, East is likely to return a diamond (at something round about the speed of light) and down you will go. That makes your chances 50-50.

Suppose, instead, you cash a couple of trumps and play the ace of spades and run the queen of spades. If East has the king of spades, he is 'toast' (thanks are due to my American colleagues for this one). He can cover or duck; either way we have ten tricks. If West has the king of spades, then we discard a losing diamond on the queen of spades. East-West can now cash two diamonds if they wish but that is the end of the party. We can cross to table with the last trump and throw the slow club loser on the master spade. This offers you odds of closer to 100%.

So what do you prefer? A 50% shot or a close-to-100% shot? As the great Homer once said: 'Doh!' (That's Homer Simpson, by the way). □

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