

WHEN you first learn bridge you are taught guidelines on how to play certain common card combinations. A typical example is given by the saying 'Eight ever, nine never' to deal with whether you finesse or play for the drop with combinations missing just the queen.

- (a) A K J 10 9 opposite 4 3 2  
 (b) A K J 10 9 8 opposite 4 3 2

With eight you 'ever' finesse. To be more grammatical, the normal play with combination (a) is to start by playing the ace (in case the queen is singleton) and if the queen doesn't drop you cross with another suit to the weak hand for a finesse. With nine you 'never' finesse, meaning that with (b) you simply play out the ace and king unless something happens to persuade you to do otherwise.

As you gain more experience you realise that you cannot consider any individual suit except in the context of the whole hand. In hand (c) you are playing teams of four. The contract is 4♠ played by West and the lead is the ♠Q. You win with your ♠K and cash the ♠A but there is no sign of the ♠Q. How should you continue?

(c)

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

Your best chance of escaping without a spade loser would indeed be to enter dummy with the ♠A for a spade finesse, but if that loses to North's ♠Q a heart switch through your ♥K could well leave you staring at four losers.

The point is that if South has the ♠Q he cannot switch to a heart without conceding a trick to the ♥K, so if the spade finesse is going to win the trick you hardly need to take it. Therefore start by cashing the ♠A K. If the ♠Q hasn't dropped:

□ If the spades were 3-2 switch your attention to diamonds, aiming to throw a heart on dummy's fourth diamond.

□ If either defender started with four spades continue with the ♠J.

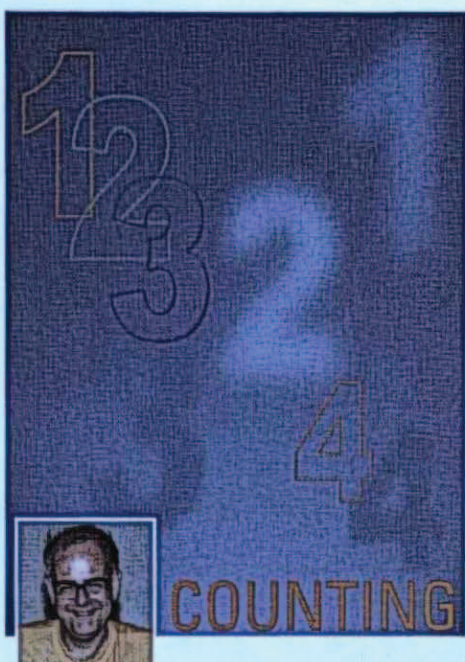
In hand (d) you have found the excellent contract of 3NT played by West and the defenders have helped you by starting with the ♥Q.

(d)

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

It would be absurd to dogmatically quote 'nine never' and cash your two top clubs. Of course, if the ♠Q fails to drop you can continue driving it, leaving you with nine top tricks but that is useless if you cannot reach them.

Your No Trump game is a certainty provided you are not greedy. You should win the ♥A and take a first round finesse of the ♠J. Even if South started with all four missing clubs he cannot hurt you. He might allow the ♠J to win, but you can



## In this new series Andrew Kambites shows how counting improves your bridge...

calmly continue with the ♠10 and he must now either take his ♠Q or lose it.

I think most players would get this right playing teams but how about if you are playing pairs? There might be the occasional pair not finding the No Trump game so by safeguarding your game you at least ensure beating them. The other thing to bear in mind is that if you are missing four cards in a suit the odds might favour playing for the drop but it is very marginal! A doubleton queen offside is more likely than Q x x onside, but the difference in odds is barely noticeable and almost any slight reason or clue should influence you to take the opposite view. Taking a first round finesse in clubs is good bridge at any form of scoring!

In (e) North opens, non vulnerable, with a weak 2♦ bid (5-9 points) and you end up in 7♠ by West. North starts with the ♦K won by your ♦A. When you cash the ♠A North follows with the ♠9 and South with the ♠8. What now?

(e)

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

North does not need the ♠Q for his bid, neither can you deduce that he cannot have it. The odds are close between a second round finesse and playing for the drop, but there is the clue that if North started with 6 of the 8 missing diamonds there is more room for South to hold the ♠Q. If you were playing in 7NT there would be a case for playing your hearts and clubs to try to get a count on the shape of the defenders' hands, but playing in 7♠ all this is likely to achieve is leading you to concede an unwelcome ruff. Your best play is to enter dummy with the ♥A and finesse your ♠J.

Of course if North started with ♠Q 9 all

along you will hardly welcome partner telling you that you should never finesse for the queen when holding nine!

The same principles apply to the following combinations in which you are missing the king.

- (f) A Q J 10 9 opposite 6 5 4 3 2  
 (g) A Q J 10 9 8 opposite 6 5 4 3 2

With (f) the odds are fairly clearcut in favour of finessing the missing king, so you would need strong reasons to disregard them. With (g) the odds are very close.

In hand (h) your contract is 4♠ after East aggressively raised West's 1♠ opening bid to game. North leads the ♠J, taken by dummy's ♠A. You continue with the ♠2 and South follows with the ♠7. Do you play your ♠A or ♠Q?

(h)

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

In theory you either guess right and make 11 tricks (discarding a heart on dummy's fourth diamond) or guess wrong and score only nine tricks. The odds favour playing for the drop, but only very slightly.

In practice there is another factor to take into account. If South wins a trick with the ♠K a heart switch should be obvious, particularly because if North was void in spades he will have had the opportunity to signal for a heart. On the other hand, if North holds a combination like ♥A Q 3 it might be anything but obvious for him to switch to a heart if he wins a trick with the singleton ♠K. It might be significant that he didn't seem to want to lead a heart at trick 1. This should be enough to persuade you to finesse your ♠Q.

Declarers often forget that defenders don't have access to the full facts, and that sometimes it can be seen that the killing defence will be more obvious to one than the other.

'Counting' continues in the next edition.

### Four charities benefit from EBU Sim Pairs

Four charities – the Ace Centre Advisory Trust, Caring & Sharing Trust, Florence Nightingale Hospice and Kids – have each been presented with £2,112, raised by last year's EBU Charity Simultaneous Pairs.

**Results:** 1 John Williamson & Adrian Gallop, N.London Gay Group 77.15%; 2 Ting To & Bob Rowlands, White House 73.19; 3 Chris Megahey & Martin Smith, Lingwood 71.61; 4 J Henderson & J Slater, The Oaks 71.29; 5 Tony Ratcliff & Dean Hardie, Pencoed 70.56; 6 Arthur Bloxham & Geoff Davies, Stafford 70.06; 7 Bernard Goldenfield & Rhona Goldenfield, Besses O'th'barn 69.93; 8 Ray Hutchins & John Burton, Towcester 69.91; 9 W J Massey & E Lloyd, Swaffham 69.87; 10 Jean Dobson & Geoffrey Parker, South Shields 69.45.