

IT IS common to hear an expert learnedly quoting the 'principle of restricted choice' to explain why he has just taken a 'wrong view'. Since it seems quite an abstract concept the lesser player rarely argues back. The most dismissive counter-attack I ever heard was from a life master who described the concept as 'a load of nonsense'. Actually the word wasn't 'nonsense' but the Editor might do a little discreet censoring if I could remember the actual word used.

The principle of restricted choice isn't that difficult, and it is not nonsense. Consider this hand played by West in 6♣:

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

North leads the ♣2, and dummy's ♠Q loses to the ♣K. South returns the ♣J, taken by dummy's ♠A. When the ♠K is cashed South plays the ♠4 and North the ♠Q. Spades are continued and South follows with the ♠5. Decision time. Do you finesse the ♠10 (playing North for the ♠Q singleton) or play your ♠A (hoping North started with ♠QJ doubleton)?

You could consider North's carding habits. Suppose you believe North would always woodenly follow suit to the ♠K with his lowest card. In that case you can be fairly certain that North started with the ♠Q singleton.

On the other hand suppose you think North is one of those smart Alocs who can always be relied on to falsecard with the ♠Q from ♠QJ doubleton. In that case you have no clue as to whether North started with ♠QJ doubleton or ♠Q singleton, so you are on a guess.

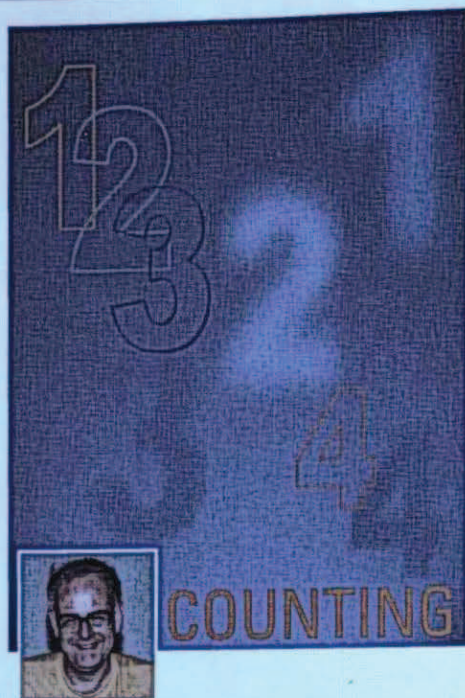
At worst it is 50/50. At best it could be nearly 100% to finesse. It seems to be right to take the finesse.

Of course an expert North will try not to be predictable. From ♠QJ doubleton sometimes he will play the ♠Q and sometimes the ♠J. However with just the ♠Q singleton he would always have to play it! Therefore, although ♠QJ and ♠Q are almost equally likely he would have had a choice not to play the ♠Q with the former holding. The principle of restricted choice says that if as a result of his playing an honour card you can play a defender for various holdings, it pays to assume he didn't have a choice of which of touching honours to play.

However you look at it, you should consider it to be about twice as likely that North started with the singleton ♠Q than with the ♠QJ doubleton! So you finesse the ♠10, North showing out, and draw the last trump with the ♠A.

Now you need four heart tricks. You might try cashing a few trumps in the hope that a defender discards foolishly but they both stubbornly cling to their hearts, giving you no clues. When you try the ♥A, North follows with the ♥3 and South with the ♥4. Next, on the ♥K North plays the ♥5 and South an interesting ♥10. Now on the ♥2 North shows the ♥6. Which heart do you play from dummy?

If South had started with ♥J104 he



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would have had a choice of the ♥10 or ♥J when you played the ♥K. If he had ♥104 doubleton he would have had no choice. It is correct to take the finesse.

It is often said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, as declarer found on the next hand:

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

Playing in 3NT after East had opened 1♦ he received the lead of the ♠2 and won trick 1 with the ♠K. Needing four diamond tricks for his contract he cashed the ♦A at trick 2 and South followed with the ♦10. Knowing the principle of restricted choice he returned to his hand with the ♥A and finessed the ♦9. South won the ♦J and the roof caved in!

Was declarer unlucky that South had ♦J10 doubleton? Not a bit of it. In fact South didn't have ♦J10 doubleton - he had ♦J102 and had succeeded in conning declarer.

The point about this hand is that ♦10 singleton and ♦J10 doubleton were not the only possible holdings for South. It is almost mandatory for South to falsecard with ♦J10x in order to give declarer a losing option.

It is important to realise that the principle of restricted choice applies only to touching honours. In this hand West is in 3NT:

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

He wins the lead of the ♠Q with his ♠K and finesses dummy's ♥10, losing to South's ♥Q. Another spade is returned to

dummy's ♠A and although declarer can temporise by running four rounds of clubs he will have to decide whether his ninth trick will come from a second heart finesse or a diamond finesse.

Here it is clearcut to finesse hearts. With the ♥Q and ♥K South would have had a choice of which to play. Assume he didn't have the choice.

This hand seems similar but is very different:

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

Again West is in 3NT and on winning the ♠K at trick 1 he finesses the ♥10, losing to the ♥J.

Now there is no clue as to who holds the ♥K. The point is that the ♥K and ♥J are not touching cards.

Finally:

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

As West you are in 6NT after the following bidding sequence: 2NT-4NT-6NT.

The lead is the ♣5. You win the ♣K and drive out the ♦A, winning the club return with your ♣Q. North started with ♦87, and when you cash the clubs you can't be sure whether he started with three clubs or four.

After this bidding sequence it was predictable that North should choose a passive lead. Suppose North started with rubbish in each black suit. Why should he have chosen to lead clubs rather than spades? The principle of restricted choice suggests you should assume he didn't have this choice, so you might do best to play North for the ♠Q.

PAIRS QUIZ by Bob Rowlands

Dealer North. Love All

W	N	E	S
-	1♦	1NT	?

What do you bid with:

- a) ♠10872 ♥QJ10752 ♦3 ♣73
 b) ♠KJ82 ♥63 ♦Q10743 ♣93
 c) ♠AJ983 ♥KQ1072 ♦K3 ♣6

Answers:

- a) 2♣ - Risky but passing 1NT is unlikely to lead to a good score. If partner bids again at least he will know better next time.
 b) 3♦ - The opponents probably have a good contract somewhere - this should make it difficult for them to find it.
 c) 2NT - You could double but it looks likely they will run to 2♣ and the penalty from this will surely not be enough.
 Better to create a game forcing situation now by cue-bidding. This implies a strong two suiter (at least 5/5 shape) and is forcing to game.