

LET'S look at the logic that determines how you tackle a critical suit. In all examples assume you have plenty of entries to either hand unless you are told otherwise.

In (a) you wish to play the spades for as many tricks as possible.



The principle of leading up to honours may suggest to you that you should start with low to the ♠J, but here you have a finesse which you are bound to take (for the ♠K), and a finesse which you might choose to take later (for the ♠10). That changes your approach.

Tackle this by looking at your main objective, which is making three tricks (at least) if spades are 3-2. That rules out the possibility of starting with low from South to North's ♠8 because you could lose two tricks if East started with ♠K 10 5. That doesn't mean that you will never take a finesse against the ♠10, but you will only consider it (unless it is marked) if the finesse against the ♠K wins. To find out, while still keeping your options intact, start with the ♠Q.

If West covers with the ♠K you are guaranteed three tricks. Win the ♠A and return to your hand for a finesse to North's ♠9. If successful you will take all four spade tricks.

If the ♠Q loses to East's ♠K, when you next gain the lead, try cashing the ♠A. If East shows out return to your hand for a marked finesse against West's ♠10.

Now try (b), given that you have no outside entry to the South hand.



Your main strategy is to play out your top three honours, making four tricks if the suit breaks 3-3 or if the ♠J is doubleton or singleton. It is too easy to start automatically by cashing the high card from the shorter holding. Instead you should ask if you can see any secondary chances you can utilise without prejudicing your main chance.

Consider the layout in (c).



If you start with the ♠K and then lead to North's ♠A you are in the wrong hand to take the marked finesse against West's ♠J. Correct play is to start with North's ♠A and then cross to South with the ♠K.

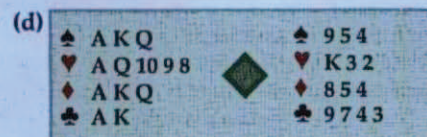
Look at this principle in the context of a real hand. Consider your play in hands (d) and (e). In each case the contract is 7NT and North leads the ♠J (see next column).

In (d) your main chance is to find hearts 3-2 or a singleton ♥J, hence you will not



## Andrew Kambites

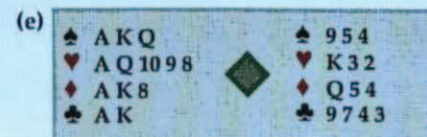
### A new series to help you improve your card play



take any finesse against the ♥J unless it is marked.

You are unlikely to succeed if North has ♥J 7 5 4. To cater for South holding ♥J 7 5 4 you should tackle the hearts by cashing the ♥A, and entering dummy with the ♥K. (It doesn't do any harm to try the ♥10 to dummy's ♥K on the second round, but only a very naïve North would cover with the ♥J.)

(e) looks very similar to (d), but this time your extra entry to dummy lets you succeed if South has all five hearts. Again the contract is 7NT



Start by entering dummy with the ♥K. If North shows out finesse your ♥10, cross with the ♦Q and finesse again.

If both defenders follow suit return to the West hand with the ♥A. If South is seen to have started with ♥J 7 5 4 you have the ♦Q as an entry to dummy to take the marked finesse.

Sometimes when you have a two-way finesse with nothing to guide your choice you should decide by looking at your subsidiary chances.

How should you tackle the combinations in (f) and (g)?



In (f) you can catch ♥Q 6 or ♥Q 7 6 in either hand if you correctly guess which way to finesse, while ♥Q 8 7 6 in either hand will leave you with one heart loser whatever you do. So can you deal with any 4-1 heart break? You can cater for West holding the singleton ♥Q if you start by leading low to the ♥A, intending to subsequently finesse your ♥J.

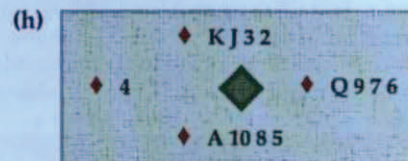


In (g) your main chance lies in a 3-2 diamond break with you correctly guessing the position of the ♦Q. Provided you start by cashing one top honour before taking the finesse (eg. ♦A, then finesse North's ♦J) you won't lose to a singleton ♦Q. How about other 4-1 breaks?

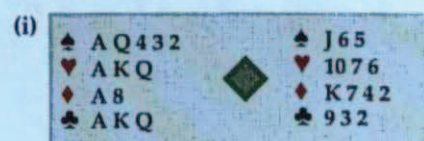
Possession of the ♦8 in your hand does give you extra options. You must start by cashing dummy's ♦K. Then lead the ♦J. You are playing East for the ♦Q.

If East fails to cover the ♦J let it run and you will be guaranteed four diamond tricks.

If East covers the ♦J with the ♦Q you will take the ♦A. Then if the layout is as in (h) you will have a marked finesse against East's ♦9.



In the final example your play is determined by how many tricks you need in a vital suit. You have bid hand (i) to 6♣ playing teams of four. How do you tackle the trump suit?



You have some chance of avoiding a spade loser. If South has the ♠K doubleton you can lead the ♠6 from the East hand to your ♠Q and then cash the ♠A, felling South's ♠K.

However you should not be thinking in this way. You can afford one spade loser, so your first question is: 'What is my main chance of losing only one trick?'

Clearly you will succeed if trumps are 3-2. Do you have any realistic chance of avoiding two trump losers if the suit breaks 4-1? Sadly, not much, but you can succeed if either defender started with a singleton ♠K. You must start by cashing your ♠A. If both defenders follow small you will need a 3-2 break.

#### GAME ADDRESS

The Royal Mail has shown inadvertent felicity by changing The Editor's postcode to EX14 3NT.