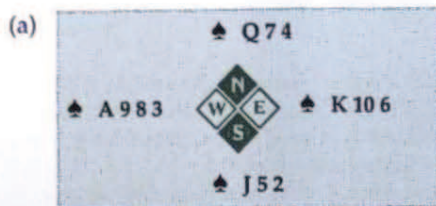


HAVE you ever heard of a 'frozen suit'? Look at layout (a). How many tricks in the suit is each side entitled to?



Suppose South has the lead and leads the ♠2. West plays low and North can do no better than try the ♠Q. East takes the ♠K and returns the ♠10, allowing West to take the remainder.

Alternatively West has the lead. If he leads the ♠A clearly North/South will take a trick with either the ♠Q or the ♠J. If he underleads the ♠A and North plays low East must rise with the ♠K to prevent South taking the trick with the ♠J, but again either North's ♠Q or South's ♠J will subsequently win a trick.

Can you see the implication of this? Whichever player opens up the suit concedes a trick to the other side. The suit is effectively frozen, doomed to exist with both sides avoiding it like the plague!

Two points need to be stressed.

Firstly, you must know how to play a frozen suit if the enemy open it up for you. All too frequently I have seen inexperienced players receive a gift with the lead of the ♠3 in a layout like (a) against their No Trump contract, only to hand the gift straight back by rising with dummy's ♠Q.

Secondly, the best way to oblige opponents to open up a frozen suit to your advantage is by means of an endplay.

Here is another frozen suit:



If North leads the ♥10, East covers with the ♥Q, won by South's ♥A, but West still has the ♥K poised over South's ♥J so South never makes a second heart trick.

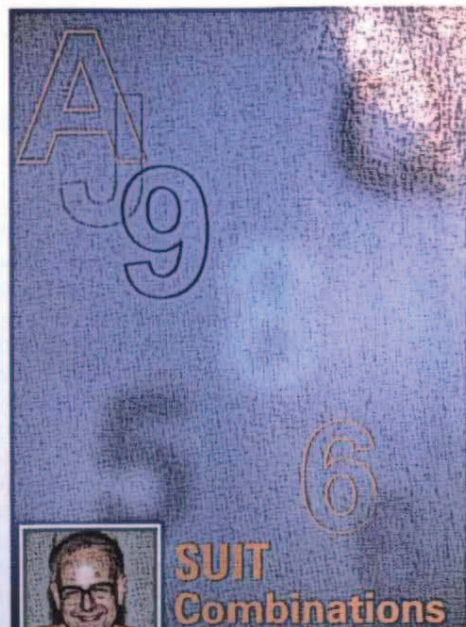
If North leads a low heart to his ♥J West takes the ♥K, but East still has the ♥Q hovering over the ♥10.

If South leads the ♥4 towards North, West plays low and East's ♥Q beats North's ♥10. West's ♥K is still ready to deny South's ♥J.

Clearly if North or South open up the heart suit they are held to one trick. What if East/West lead the suit?

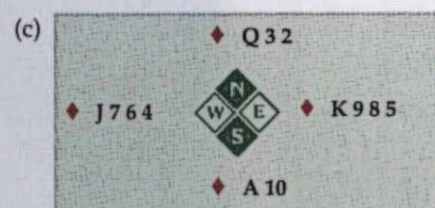
If West leads the ♥5 North must play low and East plays the ♥Q to prevent South winning a cheap trick with the ♥J. This only puts off the problem for the defenders because now the ♥J and ♥10 are equals against West's ♥K.

Finally, if East switches to the ♥6 South plays low and West plays the ♥K. Now South has a finesse position of ♥AJ sitting over East's ♥Q8.



Andrew Kambites Last in his series to help improve your card play

(c) another frozen suit. I am sure that you can work out all the possibilities.



From a practical point of view, if West leads the suit against your No Trump contract you guarantee yourself two stoppers in the suit by playing low from dummy!

On the other hand, how do you play if West leads the suit against your slam contract? Your need now might be to take the first two tricks in the suit. In that case you must decide whether West is more likely to have underled the ♦K or the ♦J. If you want a guideline try this:

Good players are more likely to underlead a king than a jack against a slam. That is because they recognise the need to set up tricks before declarer can draw trumps and establish his side suit for discards. Leading from the king can gain either if partner has the ace or (more likely) if partner has the queen and an outside entry.

Inexperienced players are more likely to underlead a jack than a king against a slam. That is because they fear that if they underlead a king they may lose it forever, and also because they mistakenly believe that underleading a jack is somehow passive. It is not passive! It is quite likely to give away a trick, and more importantly, highly unlikely to establish any quick tricks for the defence!

Layout (d) is an interesting example (see top of next column).

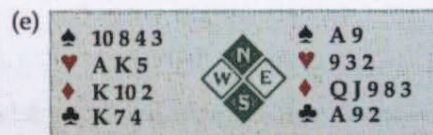
Often defenders in the East position (with North as dummy) think that a switch to the ♠2 is safe. They quote the



idea of leading through strength and up to weakness. It isn't safe! South simply plays low and West is forced to waste his ♠K to prevent dummy's ♠10 winning. The flaw in this argument is that with the ♠10 dummy is not 'weakness'. The purpose of East's ♠J should be to neutralise dummy's ♠10. Switching to the ♠2 is effectively freeing dummy's ♠10 from the attention of East's ♠J. Of course if the defenders need to establish spade tricks as a matter of urgency East may need to switch to the ♠2, but he shouldn't delude himself that this is passive or safe.

I finish off this series by leaving the subject of frozen suits and looking at how you tackle two suits when they are led by your opponents.

In example (e) North leads the ♠6 against your 3NT. Which card should you play from dummy?

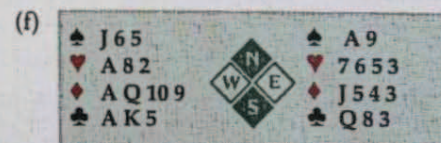


West	North	East	South
INT	No	2NT	No
3NT			

Most declarers are well versed in the hold up play, so would contribute the ♠9 without thought. South wins the ♠Q (from doubleton ♠Q5) and returns a spade. When North comes in with the ♦A he cashes three more spades to defeat the contract. Could declarer have done better?

The contract is only at risk if spades break 5-2, so assume this is the case. With ♠KQJ62 North (not being blessed with second sight) would surely have led the ♠K. Therefore South is likely to have started with a doubleton honour. In that case you can block the suit by rising with dummy's ♠A at trick 1.

Finally in example (f) North leads the ♠4 against your No Trump part-score. Can you guard against likely adverse circumstances?



West	North	East	South
1♦	No	1♥	No
2NT			

Your contract is only in danger if North started with six spades and the ♦K. With ♠KQxxxx and the ♦K North would probably have overcalled 1♦ with 1♠, so if North started with six spades it is likely that South has a doubleton honour. You can block the suit by rising with dummy's ♠A. It won't help South to unblock the ♠Q because you are taking the diamond finesse into the safe hand.