

IN the real bridge world, suit combinations don't exist in the abstract. You should start by asking yourself which is the best play in a suit, but then modify it in the context of the whole hand.

As we saw in the last article, sometimes your options are restricted by lack of entries.

How should you play the spades in (a) and (b)? In each case the contract is 6♣ by West, North leading the ♦K, so with a certain diamond loser you must pick up the spades without loss.

(a)

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

How do you want to play the spades? With five missing including the ♠Q you certainly intend to finesse, but do you take two finesses or do you cash the ♠A before entering dummy to take one finesse?

Either approach succeeds if spades are 3-2 with the ♠Q in the South hand. You should now consider the layouts with a 4-1 break.

Cashing the ♠A is best if North has a singleton ♠Q.

Taking two finesses is best if South has ♠Q874

You don't need to use advanced maths to work out that if the spade break is 4-1 the ♠Q is four times more likely to be with the four-card holding than be a singleton, so you should aim for two finesses in (a).

(b)

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

Of course the same logic applies in (b). You would like to be able to take two finesses, but having only one entry to dummy you are restricted to one finesse. In that case you can only win the ♦A, cash your ♠A, cross to the ♥Q and finesse the ♠J.

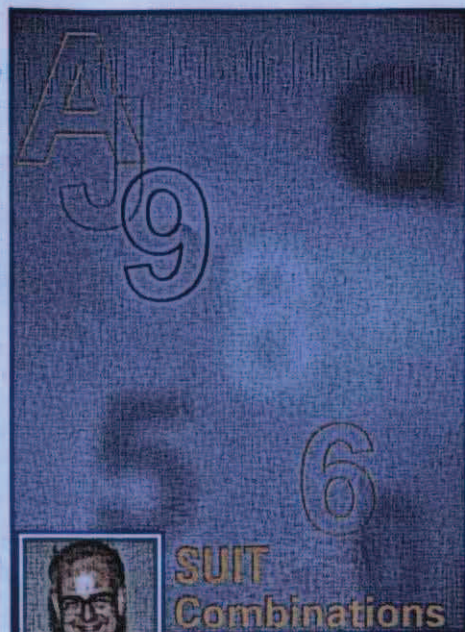
Another factor that limits your options may be your fear of losing the lead. Consider your play in the club suit in (c) and (d).

In (c) you are in 6NT on the lead of the ♠J.

(c)

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

Needing three club tricks and with no other worries you should cash the ♠A (catering for a singleton ♠K) and lead towards East's ♠Q. If South shows out you can return to hand and lead another club towards the ♠J. With this approach you only fail if South started with four clubs including the ♠K, and in that case you had no winning option.



Andrew Kambites

A series to help you improve your card play

In hand (d) the club suit is the same but the circumstances are very different. This time you are in 3NT on the lead of the ♠K.

(d)

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

Now you need two club tricks quickly and you cannot afford to lose the lead. You must enter dummy with a diamond and lead the ♠Q.

In example (e) you also have good reason to fear losing the lead. The contract is 3NT and the ♠K is led.

(e)

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

You have six top tricks and might find another three in either clubs or diamonds. You should aim to combine your chances. Taken in isolation the best way to tackle the club suit is to cash the ♠A and return to your hand for a finesse, but if that fails your weakness in spades will immediately sink your contract. Better play is try to give yourself two bites of the cherry in the minor suits. Start by cashing the ♠A K (hoping the ♠Q drops singleton or doubleton) and if that fails return to your hand to finesse diamonds.

A similar approach is necessary for hand (f). 5♦ is reached after the bidding sequence shown. South starts by cashing the ♠A and you ruff the ♠K continuation at trick 2, North signalling that he started with an odd number of spades. When you play the ♦A and ♦J North discards a club. How do you continue?

(f)

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

West	North	East	South
1NT	No	2♣	2♠
No	No	3♦	No
4♦	No	5♦	

South has as many trumps left as you, so any losing finesse will immediately leave you open to a further spade force. In that case you might as well complete drawing trumps and concentrate on finding one of the missing queens. South seems to have started with ten cards in spades and diamonds, so it is natural to play North for any missing queen. Which one should you finesse?

You need to appreciate the value of holding the ♥9, and the limitations of the club suit because you don't have the ♣9. The point is that if you finesse hearts successfully you immediately solve your problems, whereas a successful club finesse still leaves you at the mercy of the ♣9. Best play is to combine your chances by cashing the ♠A K, and if the ♠Q hasn't appeared cash the ♥A followed by running the ♥J.

(g)

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

In hand (g) the contract is 6♥ and the ♠K is led. What is your plan?

In isolation, the best way of handling the trump suit is a finesse (after playing the ♥A), but if that fails you are finished. The best play involves combining your chances. Win the ♠A and cash the ♥A K. If the ♥Q hasn't appeared turn your attention to clubs, cashing the ♠K, ♠Q and ♠A and discarding dummy's spade. If hearts break 3-2 and clubs 4-2 you can then ruff a club, return to your hand with the ♦K, cash your fifth club and ruff your ♠9. The defender with the ♥Q can take it when it suits him. He cannot damage you. The full layout is:

Dealer N	♠ K Q J 8
N/S Game	♥ Q 8 7
	♦ J 10 5 4
	♣ J 9

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

♠ 10 7 5 3 2
♥ 10 9
♦ Q 7
♣ 10 8 4 3

TEACHERS' JAMBOREE

A jamboree for EBU bridge teachers is to be held from July 28-30 at Loughborough University. It is an opportunity for teachers to improve their skills and meet and share ideas with other teachers. Details from the EBU Education Department, 01296 317206.