



The Finesse Part I

WHAT is there to say about this particular topic that isn't banal and obvious? Quite a lot, in fact. To start with, can you actually define what a finesse actually is? No? Well, the dictionary definition isn't exactly a model of clarity – here it is in all its glory:

The finesse: The attempt to gain power for lower ranking cards by taking advantage of the favourable position of higher ranking cards held by the opposition.

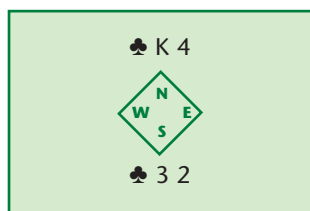
Hmmm. What that means is that there is a lot more to this than the everyday position that all textbooks use as the basis of all descriptions of the finesse:



This position is known to you all and requires only a brief description of the mechanism. The ♣A-Q holding is known as a 'tenace' (supposedly from the Spanish *tenaza*, meaning tongs or pincers) and it is axiomatic to lead up to a tenace and not away from it. Here, West is obliged to play before North (the tenace holder) after South leads the suit. Should West have the king of clubs he has no winning defence. Should East have the king of clubs, then the great dealer in the sky has smiled on

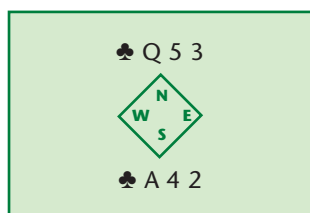
East-West and frowned on North-South. *C'est la vie.*

Anyway, the definition above means that the following layout also counts as a finesse:



Here the king of clubs will make a trick if West has the ace of clubs, always provided South takes the time and trouble to lead from his hand rather than from the North hand. True, there is no tenace position in this layout but, nonetheless, it still counts as a finesse.

So well are these positions known that players then abuse similar but crucially different layouts. For example, we have all seen this sort of butchery:



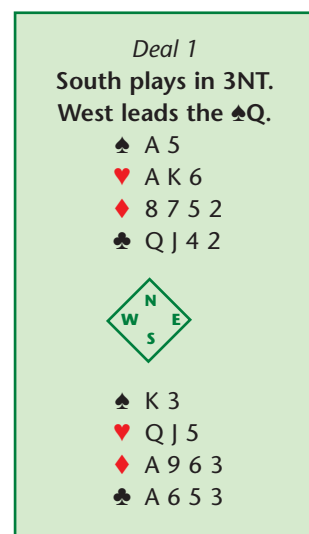
The only legitimate play for two tricks here is to hope that *West* has the king of

clubs. You can cash the ace of clubs and play up to the club queen, awaiting West's card. Some misguided players, though, deem it clever to lead and attempt to run the queen of clubs. It isn't. If West has the king of clubs, it's curtains. If East has it, he may well remember the adage 'Cover an honour with an honour' (a topic I intend to address in a later article, given indulgence by the editor) and he will place the king of clubs on the club queen, thus forcing the club ace and taking out two of the North-South high cards for one of the defenders. Against rational defence, leading the queen of clubs cannot gain.

Slightly more subtle is this layout:



How would you handle this suit for three tricks? It's time for a full deal.



South plays in 3NT and West attacks in the suit where there is mutual shortage – spades. South can count two spades, three

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When you see this in an advertisement in the magazine it means:

- The organisers of the holiday have applied for, and received, a licence.
- They may choose to give master points in accordance with EBU scales.
- These master points will be accepted and added to player records.
- The bridge will be played in line with EBU regulations and bye laws, thus affording all players the protection of playing within the jurisdiction of the EBU.

All County events advertised have an EBU licence.

NOTE: Any events licensed by another National Bridge Organisation will not be able to have master points credited to members' records save for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with whom the EBU have a reciprocal agreement.




hearts, one diamond and therefore needs three club tricks to fulfil his contract. So here we are, how should you play clubs? Many players, giving the matter little thought, would grab the ace of spades and would run the queen of clubs 'finessing through East'. But what is the point of that? Place the clubs in any way you like and you cannot avoid a club loser (assuming East-West defend accurately)

Now, admittedly, if clubs break 3-2 it doesn't matter what you do in the suit – running the queen of clubs will work equally as well as other lines. However, what if they break 4-1? This will happen over a quarter of the time so is not an idle question. If East has four clubs headed by the king then you will have two losers – as sure as eggs is eggs. But if West has four clubs ...?

Let's look at the full deal:

Deal 2
South plays in 3NT.
West leads the ♠Q.

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

Running the queen of clubs to West's king will spell defeat for declarer as there are now only ever two club tricks for North-South. Correct technique brings home the bacon. South should win the spade lead (in either hand, it doesn't matter on this deal) and should cash the ace of clubs (every now and again the king of clubs will drop singleton and that's game over). Here, everyone follows small so South continues with a small club to the jack of clubs. When that holds, South returns to the closed hand with the queen of hearts and plays another club, cooking West's goose. 3NT makes whenever clubs are 3-2, whenever the king of clubs is singleton and whenever West has the king of clubs. Leading the queen of clubs from dummy never makes the contract when cashing the ace of clubs does not.

Yes, this play is a finesse, but it's a finesse through West, not through East. □

Top Table



Tom Townsend

TOM TOWNSEND won the 1994 Junior European Teams Championship and followed this up with winning the Junior World Teams Championships in 1995. In his post-Junior days, Tom has won most of the national competitions at least once, and gained a silver medal in the World Open Bridge Teams at the 2008 Mind Sports Games. In 2012, he was in the England open team that qualified for the 2013 Bermuda Bowl and reached the quarter-finals in Bali.

When did you start playing bridge?

My parents got me playing some kind of three-handed version when I was about nine or ten.

How often do you play?

Most weekends and several longer tournaments a year, home or abroad. Abroad often means Poland, as Ewa (Kater) and our son Max still live in Warsaw. Mid-week action when I'm in London could be duplicate pairs at the Young Chelsea, a team-of-four match of some kind, or a few rubbers at TGR's.

Do you always play with the same partners / team-mates?

I am comfortable with a wide range of partners but tend to stick with one line-up for each season's major events. Having turned 40 I no longer expect my partners to remember vast reams of system. Qualities I rate more highly are solidarity, patience and (as they say often on the US golf tour) remaining in the present tense. You can't replay boards past but try telling some players that.

What do you do for a living?

Play bridge; write the *Daily Telegraph*

bridge column, Monday to Friday.

What are your favourite bridge books?

Reese and Bird (his monks series).

What are your hobbies?

Backgammon and sports betting.

What do you like and what would you change in bridge?

Bridge is the greatest game for many intrinsic and social reasons familiar to all players but I fear for the English tournament circuit. Are talented young card players likely to be attracted to contests which return around 10% of entry fees in prize-money? No. Entry fees are high regardless, and many events decline year on year in numbers and prestige. If we are to remain a major bridge nation the EBU must find a way to increase the appeal of its tournaments and offer better value. Easier said than done admittedly.

What's the bridge success (so far) closest to your heart?

The 1994 Junior European Championships. We overtook Denmark on the last match to snatch gold. My first major success and still the most exciting.

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