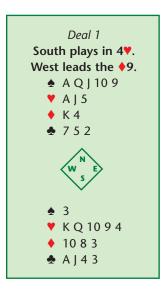# Basic Cardplay

by Paul Bowyer

The Finesse Part III

THE last two articles have been about finesses – why should this one be any different? This time, though, we are going to start with a deal and expand on a theme:
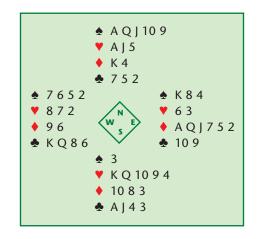
Deal 1

South plays in 4♥.
West leads the ♦9.

♠ A Q J 10 9
♥ A J 5
♦ K 4
♣ 7 5 2

♠ 3
♥ K Q 10 9 4
♦ 10 8 3
♣ A J 4 3

North opens 1♠, East sticks in a non-vulnerable overcall of 2♦ and South ends up in 4♥. Dummy is decent but the nine of diamonds lead is not what South was hoping to see (well, to be accurate, the ♦K-x on table was not what South was hoping to see). East takes his ♦A-Q and switches to the ten of clubs. How are ten tricks to be made here?

Well, a count of tricks might help… South can see one spade, five hearts, one club and a diamond ruff on table. That's a total of eight. Should he rely on the spade finesse? Well, what use would that be? Suppose you play a spade to the ♠9 and it were to hold. What next? That would be nine tricks but where's the tenth? Also, do you really think West has the ♠K after the bidding and early play?
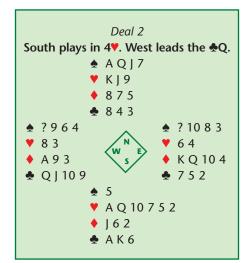
We need to think about this in a different way. Taking the 'normal' spade finesse gains us only one trick; we need more than that as we have three club losers we need to ditch.

Take a look at the full deal

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                 ♠ A Q J 10 9
                 ♥ A J 5
                 ♦ K 4
                 ♣ 7 5 2
    ♠ 7 6 5 2                    ♠ K 8 4
    ♥ 8 7 2          N           ♥ 6 3
    ♦ 9 6         W     E        ♦ A Q J 7 5 2
    ♣ K Q 8 6        S           ♣ 10 9
                 ♠ 3
                 ♥ K Q 10 9 4
                 ♦ 10 8 3
                 ♣ A J 4 3
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The right line of play is to hope that East has the king of spades. We take the ace of clubs at trick three and immediately play a spade to the ace and lead the queen of spades. What can East do? When he plays the king we ruff, draw trumps ending on table and bin the losing clubs on dummy's long spades. This play (as you probably know) is called the 'ruffing finesse' and it is preferable to the ordinary finesse on this deal firstly because of the bidding and – more importantly – because it has the potential to generate more winners. Note that we do not even need the diamond ruff on table . . .

Preferring a ruffing finesse to a normal finesse is not always because of its potential to make more tricks. Take a look at this deal:

Deal 2
South plays in 4♥. West leads the ♣Q.

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                 ♠ A Q J 7
                 ♥ K J 9
                 ♦ 8 7 5
                 ♣ 8 4 3
    ♠ ? 9 6 4                    ♠ ? 10 8 3
    ♥ 8 3            N           ♥ 6 4
    ♦ A 9 3       W     E        ♦ K Q 10 4
    ♣ Q J 10 9       S           ♣ 7 5 2
                 ♠ 5
                 ♥ A Q 10 7 5 2
                 ♦ J 6 2
                 ♣ A K 6
```

South plays in a normal 4♥ and West leads the obvious queen of clubs. In retrospect, a low diamond lead would have been best for the defence but no one other than an escapee from a local institute would have found that one . . . South can see nine tricks on top (one spade, six hearts and two clubs). There are three obvious diamond losers and a slow club loser. Now, there are two possible ways of getting rid of a loser – declarer could play a spade to the jack (a 'normal' finesse) or could play the ace of spades and run the queen of spades, taking the ruffing finesse. Which line offers the better chances?

Well, suppose you draw a couple of trumps and play a spade to the jack. If it holds. you rack up your game bonus. If it fails, though, East is likely to return a diamond (at something round about the speed of light) and down you will go. That makes your chances 50-50.

Suppose, instead, you cash a couple of trumps and play the ace of spades and run the queen of spades. If East has the king of spades, he is 'toast' (thanks are due to my American colleagues for this one). He can cover or duck; either way we have ten tricks. If West has the king of spades, then we discard a losing diamond on the queen of spades. East-West can now cash two diamonds if they wish but that is the end of the party. We can cross to table with the last trump and throw the slow club loser on the master spade. This offers you odds of closer to 100%.

So what do you prefer? A 50% shot or a close-to-100% shot? As the great Homer once said: 'Doh!' (That's Homer Simpson, by the way). ❐