




These hands continue practising spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'. Part 2 of 2. ACOL version. Updated summer 2015.

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ A2	
	♥ J654	
	♦ 764	
	♣ AT43	
West		East
♠ J93		♠ T8654
♥ Q		♥ KT973
♦ QJT95		♦ K8
♣ J985		♣ 7
	South	
	♠ KQ7	
	♥ A82	
	♦ A32	
	♣ KQ62	

The dictionary definition of a finesse is:

"Gaining power for lower ranking cards by taking advantage of the favourable position of higher ranking cards held by the opposition."

There, that's clear enough, isn't it?

As clear as mud, maybe. Remember that in this series, as in the previous series, the cards will have been "exposed" for you by the early play. You will know how they lie and need to know how to neutralise the opponents' threats. The crucial point is that you must make the opponent with a critical card *play second*.

Having played through the first series in this edition the (abstruse) definition above might just make some sort of sense. This series carries on with this theme. Believe us when we say that this is one of the most important techniques of card-play in bridge.

Here, in Hand 1, you just have to pull in four tricks in your main suit.

How might you go about that?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♣
P	1♥	P	2NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ Q

Bidding.

We open 1♣ after two Passes and rebid 2NT over North's 1♥ response. In this manner we are showing a balanced hand of 17-18 points and, crucially, are making a **limit bid**.

The ball is in partner's court now. With 9 points he has enough to take us to game.

Play.

West leads the ♦Q. A little surprisingly, from our perspective, East unblocks his ♦K. This defence only makes sense if East has a doubleton (or singleton) King; in any case, West has clearly led from a long suit headed by the ♦Q J 10. Anyway, we need to **Count** and **Plan**.

We can count eight *top tricks* (three Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and three Clubs). If Clubs break 3-2 that suit would give us our ninth trick.

We also have a chance if Clubs break 4-1 with **West** having four. Our plan is to play off the ♣K Q, taking notice of whether East shows out on the second round. If he does, we can finesse West for the ♣J on the third round.

We should realise that we have no chance of four Club tricks if East started with ♣J 9 × ×. With that holding our right-hand opponent could sit and wait patiently – we'd have no play to rake in all the Club tricks.

In essence, we can cope with a 4-1 Club break but not with a 1-4 break. If you see what we mean.

So, in detail, the play goes as follows. We win the Diamond lead in hand with the ♦A. Next we play off the ♣K Q, hoping that everyone follows suit. If that were to happen then the suit would be splitting 3-2 and both the remaining Clubs on the table (the ♣A 10) would be winners.

As it happens, East shows out on the second round, so we know that Clubs are actually 4-1. This doesn't worry us as we know that West

has the ♣J 9 remaining. We play the ♣2 from the closed hand *through* the forlorn victim on our left and wait to see what he does. When West, with a deep sigh, plays the ♣9 we are able to win with dummy's ♣10. Next comes the ♣A which drops the last remaining Club.

We now have five tricks and we are in Easy Street. There are four more low-hanging fruit in the guise of the three top Spades and the ♥A.

This contract makes because of careful *Counting* and *Planning*. We need to play Clubs in such a way that we could cope with any 3-2 break or when West has four.


If the Great Dealer in the Sky had given East four Clubs headed by the ♣J we'd be doomed. *C'est la vie*.



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VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ AK65	
	♥ Q73	
	♦ 8	
	♣ A9632	
West		East
♠ Q984		♠ J2
♥		♥ T8654
♦ KQJ76		♦ T953
♣ T854		♣ KQ
	South	
	♠ T73	
	♥ AKJ92	
	♦ A42	
	♣ J7	

Keeping your wits about you is an important part of this game.

How many contracts have gone down through poor planning, or through inattentive declarer play?

Visualising the order in which you play the cards is an essential strategy.

In this hand, as in so many deals, the key to success is **counting your tricks**

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♥
P	2♣	P	2♥
P	4♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ K

Bidding.

After East Passes as dealer we open 1♥ and see partner respond 2♣. With a minimum opening bid, and five Hearts, we rebid 2♥.

Partner gives us no further leeway – with an opening bid himself he now raises us to the Heart game.

Play.

West has an easy lead of the ♦K, from a suit headed by the ♦K Q J. We take time out to **Count** and **Plan**.

As ever, in a suit contract, we count *winners* and *losers*. In terms of **losers** we see one Spade, two Diamonds (one of which can be trumped in dummy) and one Club. Too many.

What about winners? We can see two Spades, five Hearts (unless the furies are really on the warpath), one Diamond and one Club.

With only nine winners it would be wrong to draw trumps prematurely; we need to ruff a Diamond before dummy's trumps disappear. Remember – in general we draw trumps *only when we can see sufficient winners for the contract*. If we can't (as here) we need to look around for extras. A ruff in the dummy (in the **short trump hand**) would certainly count as "an extra".

With a clear Plan in mind we win the ♦A at trick one, ruff a Diamond on the table and then (and only then) start drawing trumps, playing the ♥Q (*play the high cards from the short side first*) as our first play in the suit.

We may well blink when West shows out of Hearts (a 5-0 break is a rarity, after all) but should realise that it doesn't much matter. In fact, it doesn't matter at all. We know exactly where the remaining trumps are and we can finesse East for the ♥10 on the second round.

This entails leading dummy's last Heart *through* East and waiting to see what that player does.

When East forlornly plays a low card (he has no winning option) we win the ♥9 from the closed hand and then draw the rest of the trumps – all of them.

The hard work is over and the rest is just routine housework. We simply cash our Club and Spade winners to make our contract.


Remember, if we've decided to employ a **trump losers** strategy, we will usually need to postpone pulling trumps. If we're going to **dump losers** on a long suit in dummy, it's just the opposite.

Ten tricks come from two Spades, **six** Hearts (that's five in hand and a ruff), the ♦A and the ♣A.



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VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North		
	♠ Q9653		
	♥ A62		
	♦ JT		
	♣ 753		
West		East	
♠ T72		♠ AJ8	
♥ QJT73		♥ 84	
♦ K963		♦ Q854	
♣ T		♣ J862	
	South		
	♠ K4		
	♥ K95		
	♦ A72		
	♣ AKQ94		

You're going to have to keep several balls in the air at the same time with this hand.

You'll need to deal with a bad split (now, that's a surprise!), while preserving a stopper and creating an entry.

Never lose sight of your target number of tricks.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♣
P	1♠	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

With a balanced 19 count (5-3-3-2 hands count as being balanced), we open the bidding with our longest suit, 1♣. After partner's 1♠ response we jump to game in No-trumps, showing 19 points.

Unsurprisingly, this bid ends the auction.

Play.

West leads the ♥Q, almost certainly the top of a sequence. The first move is to pause while we **Count and Plan**.

We can count six *top tricks* (two Hearts, a Diamond, and three Clubs). We could collect another one from either the ♠K or ♠Q.

Normally, we might expect to bank on a 3-2 split in Clubs (and five Club tricks in all), but this set of deals should have made us wary. A 3-2 break has a frequency of occurrence of 68%, so nearly a third of the time suits will be less favourable.

The first point of technique is to take trick one in our hand with the ♥K, keeping the other Heart stopper in dummy as a later entry to the weaker hand.

At trick two, we tackle the Clubs by cashing the ♣A. West's play of the ♣10 is suspicious and attracts our attention. Such a high card so early in the piece? When we cash the ♣K at trick three, all is clear: Clubs are 4-1. We need a Plan B to come to the rescue.

We need to get to dummy to lead a Club *through* East's remaining ♠J ×. In all these finesse positions it is essential to make your victim play second on the trick. So – what can we use as an entry to the table? We cannot afford to use the ♥A as our entry to dummy (at least, not yet), as that would blow our last stopper. We need to set up a Spade trick while we've still got the Hearts under control.

When we play the ♠K East gobbles it up with the Ace and returns a Heart, putting us on the

table with that Ace. East might have thought of withholding his ♠A but it would have made little difference.


Once the lead is on the table we lead a Club, *through* East giving that defender a problem he cannot solve. When he shakes his head and plays low we know that we can play the ♣9, certain that it will win the trick. This is a classic, textbook **marked finesse**, and it allows us to wrap up five Club tricks.

Et voila! We take five Club tricks, one Diamond, two Hearts and one Spade. That totals nine.



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VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 54	
	♥ 854	
	♦ AK876	
	♣ 632	
West		East
♠ KQJ98		♠ T76
♥ 97		♥ KQ632
♦ T532		♦ J
♣ Q5		♣ J984
	South	
	♠ A32	
	♥ AJT	
	♦ Q94	
	♣ AKT7	

You need to be ultra-careful in handling your main source of tricks here.

You need to take your time and think it through...

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♣
P	1♦	P	2NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ K

Bidding.

We pick up a balanced 18 count and wait patiently in fourth seat for our chance to bid. There are three Passes so we are able to open 1♣. Partner responds 1♦ so we show our shape and strength with a 2NT rebid, to indicate 17-18 points. Once again, this is a **limit bid** putting partner in charge.

With 7 points and a decent five-card suit (a useful source of tricks) partner raises to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♠K, which is the top of a sequence, and we pause to take stock. We need to **Count** our tricks and make a **Plan**.

We can count seven *top tricks* (a Spade, a Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs). We need the Diamonds to behave in friendly fashion (3-2 would be delightful), as that would swell the coffers to nine.

Aiming to make five Diamond tricks, we win the first trick with the ♠A in the closed hand and then test the key suit. First we cash the ♦Q from the closed hand (*play the high cards from the short suit first*), and sit up and take notice when East produces an unexpected ♦J.

If we could be sure that the ♦J were East's only Diamond we could safely finesse twice through West by leading and running the ♦9, but if the ♦J were subterfuge by East such a play would be catastrophic.

Be quite clear that a wily opponent could easily have started with ♦J 10 or even the ♦J 10 ×. Not all our opponents are sea-green incorruptibles like you and us. It's fair to say that some opponents simply cannot be trusted (!)

To make the position entirely clear we have to play with great precision. To that end, we must lead the ♦9 from the closed hand (playing the ♦4 blocks the suit later) and overtake it in the dummy with the ♦K. If East were to follow suit on this we will know that he is a sly old fox,

never to be trusted again.

As the cards lie, East does show out on this trick (maybe he is honest after all?), but this 4-1 split is not bad news. It allows us to make five Diamond tricks (the same result as if the suit split 3-2) because it marks West with the $\diamond 10$ 5, and we are able to pick up the $\diamond 10$ with a textbook **marked finesse**.

We do this by coming back to hand with the $\clubsuit K$ then leading the $\diamond 4$ from the closed hand *through* West, trapping the $\diamond 10$. West has no winning option when we lead the $\diamond 4$; playing a low Diamond or a high Diamond is equally futile.


After cashing all five Diamonds all we have to do is tidy up the house. That involves cashing the $\heartsuit A$ and the $\clubsuit A$ to make our contract.

In all, we take one Spade, one Heart, five Diamonds and two Clubs.



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VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ A8	
	♥ AT863	
	♦ Q973	
	♣ AK	
West		East
♠ KQJ65		♠ T93
♥ J74		♥ KQ92
♦ J		♦ T652
♣ QJ94		♣ 82
	South	
	♠ 742	
	♥ 5	
	♦ AK84	
	♣ T7653	

On this deal you have to cope with a weak hand.

Firstly, you have to interpret partner's bidding (fortunately he's reliable!) and, secondly, you have to play carefully to land your contract.

Still, what else is new?

West	North	East	South
-	1♥	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ K

Bidding.

As dealer, North opens 1♥, which he would do with a wide variety of hands. Our only sensible response is the Jack-of-all-trades 1NT to show 6-9 points (and something approaching a balanced hand).

Partner now raises us to 2NT, inviting us to advance to 3NT if we are at the top of our range. With only 7 points and largely useless intermediate cards we Pass. It's a case of "Thanks, but no thanks".

Play.

West leads the ♠K, from the top of a sequence and it's time to **Count** and **Plan**.

We can see seven *top tricks* (a Spade, a Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs) so need just one more. That would happen easily enough if Diamonds were to behave by breaking 3-2. Then we'd have eight on top.

We win the first trick with the ♠A on table and immediately test the Diamonds by leading small to the ♦K in our own hand. Surprisingly, West drops the ♦J on this trick. Now, either he is fooling around and *false-carding* (in which case the Diamonds are breaking 3-2) or he has no more, in which case we would be able to take a *marked finesse* against the ♦10 in East's hand on the third round.

To uncover the truth we play a small Diamond from the closed hand to dummy's ♦Q. West does indeed show out and we are now well positioned to take the marked finesse against the ♦10 by playing *through* East.


The ♦7 from dummy does the job neatly. East has no answer – whatever he plays we have a counterplay. When he resignedly plays the ♦6 we content ourselves with the ♦8, certain that it will win the trick. The ♦K finishes off that suit.

We polish matters off by taking the ♣A K and the ♥A for our requisite eight tricks. Job done.



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VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ Q8	
	♥ AKQ42	
	♦ A72	
	♣ Q65	
West		East
♠ JT94		♠ K653
♥ J865		♥ T3
♦ Q		♦ T654
♣ KT87		♣ AJ2
	South	
	♠ A72	
	♥ 97	
	♦ KJ983	
	♣ 943	

This deal presents you with another opportunity to clean up, **if** you can bring a suit in without loss.

Once again, there is another "interesting" suit break.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
P	1♥	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ J

Bidding.

There are three Passes to North who starts the auction with 1♥. When we respond with the dustbin bid of 1NT, showing 6-9 points, partner rebids 2NT, inviting us to go to 3NT if we are at the top of our range.

With 8 points and a five-card suit we are happy to accept the invitation and bid 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♠J from a sequence. You can see now, with hindsight, that he preferred to lead from a sequence rather than a Club from a broken suit. This is usually sound defence.

Anyway, we have to think for a few moments while we **Count** our tricks and make a **Plan**.

We can see just six *on top*, these being: one Spade, three Hearts and two Diamonds and it looks like this will be a close run thing. Our longest suit is Diamonds so we will have to tackle those.

Looking at the play in more detail we see that we may as well try the ♠Q from dummy at trick one, (it isn't unheard of for players to lead the ♠J from a holding such as ♠K J 10 9). However, East dashes any hopes we may have held of making a second Spade trick by covering with the ♠K.

Winning trick one in the closed hand with the ♠A we realise that a 3-3 Heart break would not be enough for the contract and that we have to bring in the Diamond suit. So we proceed by testing the Diamonds, playing small to the ♦A on table (*play the high cards...* oh yeah, we may have mentioned this one before).

West – on our left – surprisingly drops the ♦Q on the Ace and that looks like being a singleton, in which case East is left with ♦10 6 5 and we can pick them up with a marked finesse.

However, we are able to check the Diamond layout before taking the finesse. There is no

trusting the perfidy of bridge players! So we play the ♠2 from dummy to the ♠J in the closed hand. This confirms that West is now out of Diamonds (as expected) and so we go back to dummy using the ♥A as an entry to play the ♠7 *through* East's remaining ♠10 6.

Can we hear East sigh? As ever with **marked finesses** he is on the horns of a dilemma and both of those horns are equally sharp. He has no defence. When he shrugs and plays the ♠6 we overtake the ♠7 with the ♠8 and surgically remove East's remaining Diamond with our Jack.

The hand is all over bar the shouting now. True, overtricks may be available on a good day with a 3-3 Heart break. Today, however, is not that day. We cash the remaining Diamond winner and then the ♥K Q in dummy to secure our contract and throw the scraps to the dogs.

We actually take one Spade, three Hearts and five Diamonds.