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These hands practise spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'


VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 1 SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♣ J



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North		East
♠ A53		♠ K86
♥ J965		♥ Q82
♦ 8643		♦ KT97
♣ K4		♣ 532
West		South
♠ QJT4		♠ 972
♥ Q52		♥ AKT743
♣ JT9876		♦ AJ
		♣ AQ

This deal shows how to neutralize a potential loser.

You reach 4♥ in double-quick time and get the ♣J lead, presumably from a sequence in Clubs.

You can count six top tricks (one Spade, two Hearts, one Diamond and, irritatingly, only two Clubs) and you can't avoid losing two Spades and a Diamond. Therefore, you must avoid losing any tricks in trumps. If you can manage to do that then the Heart suit will give you the extra four tricks you need.

You win the opening lead in the closed hand with the ♣A (to preserve the few entries to Dummy that you have) then start drawing trumps by cashing the ♥A, hoping that the Hearts split 2-1.

You don't get the 2-1 split you were hoping for as West shows out leaving East with the ♥Q 8 remaining. You still can't afford a Heart loser and cashing the ♥K would set up the ♥Q for the opponents. You must nullify the threat of that errant Queen and the (only) way to do that is to lead *through* it.

You must cross to dummy with the ♠A (or the ♣K if you feel strongly about it) and lead a Heart from the table, making East play second on this trick. This is the crucial point: *make your victim play second on the trick*. Whatever East chooses to play you have a counterplay.

Here, when East elects to follow with the ♥8 you can play the ♥10 **knowing** that that this will win the trick. At this point East only has the ♥Q left and you can play the ♥K to stamp on it.

This technique of preventing an opponent making a trick with a high card which is not an outright winner by playing **through** the hand

that holds it is called a *finesse* and is one of the most important card-play techniques to master.

After you have played three rounds of trumps you have made the first five tricks and all the trumps have been extracted. Your three remaining trumps plus the ♦A and the ♣K give you five more tricks and an easy route to the contract.

You make 4♥ by noticing West discard on the first round of Hearts, deducing that East has the ♥Q, then crossing to dummy and *finessing* against the Queen.

We want to turn the Heart suit's *wish cards* into winners and we do it!

A *finesse* is a technique where we turn a *Wish Card* (we *Wish* it were a winner) into a winner by leading *towards* it and (crucially) *through* a victimized opponent.

One opponent has an important high card that can beat our second best card. By leading *through* that opponent we can force him to commit himself. If he plays high we can deal with it – if he plays low we can cope with that as well.

How do we *know* what the lie of the cards is? Well, that's the whole point of this series. The cards will be marked...

Finesses come in many forms, shapes and disguises. You'll see the basic idea in this series.

Later series will expand on this idea and allow you to employ what is one of the most important card-play techniques in bridge. This series lays down the foundation work. So we hope it's easy, right...?

In Hand 1 we discover something about the trump suit very early in the piece. What can we do about it, though?



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

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 1 SA
 Date: 21/06/2014
 Dealer: East
[Play this hand online!](#)
 Contract: 3N
 By: South
 Board #: 2
 Vulnerable: None

Lead: ♣ Q

You get the ♣Q lead against 3NT, bid in rapid and common fashion. You can count seven top tricks (three Spades, three Diamonds and the ♣A). Diamonds should provide two more (and five in all) provided that the suit behaves in a friendly manner.

It doesn't matter which hand you win the first Diamond trick in. A four-card suit is not really "short" under the meaning of the act so the "Play the high cards from the short side first" rule hardly applies in this case.

You are missing the ♦J 9 8 4. If East has them all you cannot avoid losing a trick. It is worthwhile checking this assertion out; provided East covers any Diamond you care to lead from dummy he could always force a trick for himself.

However, if **West** has them all (as is the case in this layout of the cards) then you have time to play the ♦A then cross back to the ♦K to take the finesse against the ♦J.


This is the play. You win the first trick with the ♣A and hope to run off five Diamond tricks immediately. However, when you cash dummy's ♦A East, on your right, shows out. You now know West has the ♦J on your left (we say "West is marked with the ♦J") so you can return to hand with the ♦K before leading a third diamond **through** the player on your left.

What can poor old West do? When he follows suit with the ♦9 you confidently play the ♦10 from the table, finessing against the ♦J, before playing the ♦Q to drop the one remaining Diamond, the ♦J.

Now you are in sight of home and only need to cash the last Diamond and the three top Spades.

You succeed because you spend time Counting and Planning and use the **marked finesse** to stop West from gaining a trick despite holding ♦J 9 8 4.

Can you spell SATISFACTION?

North		
♠ 532		
♥ K9		
♦ AQT53		
♣ 843		
West		East
♠ J9		♠ T8764
♥ 643		♥ AQJ7
♦ J984		♦
♣ QJT5		♣ K976
South		
♠ AKQ		
♥ T852		
♦ K762		
♣ A2		

We like suits to break nicely for us. The trouble is, sometimes they don't.

When the Great Dealer in the Sky decides it's time for a suit to split badly we have to be ready and prepared.



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These hands practise spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♠ T

You end up in 4♥, having opened 1♥ and rebid 2♦, and get the ♠10 lead, probably from a suit headed by the ♠10 9 8.

Your **Count** and **Plan** reveals three inescapable losers (two Clubs and a Diamond) so you can't afford to lose a trump trick.

You can count five top tricks (three Hearts and – annoyingly – only two Spades) and Diamonds will provide three more once the ♦A is knocked out.

Hearts will be worth five tricks in all on a normal 3-2 break and there is little reason to defer drawing trumps on this deal. You can see ten tricks if the suits split reasonably (two Spades, five Hearts and three Diamonds)

This is the play.

We choose to win the ♠K first. It's not critical, but we like the extra entry in the long Diamond hand. Next come the ♥K Q (*high cards from the short side first*).

You get a small disappointment when West shows out on the second Heart but it is a cloud with a silver lining. If West has no trumps then you know East has the ♥J and you can finesse East for it on the third round of trumps.

You play the ♥2 from the table, crucially making East play next. What can the poor guy do? When East, with a shake of the head, plays the ♥7 you content yourself with the ♥8 knowing that West on your left has no Hearts with which to beat it. Now there is but one Heart left, the ♥J, and you play the ♥A to squash it.

With trumps extracted the hand is becoming easier and easier. All you need to do is to knock out the ♦A – so you can play a Diamond towards the ♦Q J on the table. When the ♦A doesn't appear on either of these you play dummy's ♠J to your ♠A to gain entry to your hand and then play the ♦K to set up the ♦10.

The defense can win their ♦A and cash two Clubs but then are forced to give you the lead back with a Spade ruff after which the last

Diamond gives you the tenth trick and your contract.

You make the contract by noticing West show out of Hearts, *marking* East with the ♥J, allowing you to *finesse* against it.

North
 ♠ KJ
 ♥ KQ2
 ♦ QJ
 ♣ JT9543

West
 ♠ T9872
 ♥ 9
 ♦ 8543
 ♣ A87



East
 ♠ 6543
 ♥ J765
 ♦ A97
 ♣ KQ

South
 ♠ AQ
 ♥ AT843
 ♦ KT62
 ♣ 62

Once again you need to deal with an annoying bad break and deal with a defender's irritating holding.

The opposition will try to foil you, but you can handle it.



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These hands practise spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

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

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 1 SA
 Contract: 3N
 By: South
 Date: 21/06/2014
 Dealer: West
 Board #: 4
 Vulnerable: None
[Play this hand online!](#)

Lead: ♠ 2

You reach 3NT after an invitational sequence and get the ♠2 lead – so that is probably from a four-card suit.

You can count seven top tricks (one Spade, one Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs). Diamonds will provide two more tricks if the suit breaks 3-2. Is there any possibility of scoring five Diamond tricks if the suit breaks 4-1? Yes, but only in very limited circumstances.

This is the play. You win the opening lead with the ♠A and test the Diamonds by playing off the ♠A Q (*play the high cards from the short side first*).

On the third trick, Murphy's Law kicks in ("*Whatever can go wrong will go wrong*"). You see East show out on the second Diamond, but notice that East's singleton was the ♦10. This is crucial. Diamonds are not splitting 3-2 but can still be picked up as West started with ♦J 8 7 6

You can now play the ♦5 from the closed hand *through* West's ♦J 8 and wait to see what he does. When that hapless, helpless opponent plays the ♦8 you can cover that with the ♦9 in the dummy, secure in the knowledge that it will win the trick.

The ♦K from the table now drops the only outstanding Diamond, leaving the ♦4 as a winner (which needs to be cashed immediately).

You have six tricks now and all that remains is to take the ♠A K and the ♥A to secure your contract before losing interest in the rest.

Success is yours because you pay attention to the spot cards. When you see the ♦10 is singleton, you know where the rest are. You don't let a little thing like a 4-1 split stop you.

(Just be glad they were *in front* of your long side! If East had started with ♦J 8 7 6 3NT would have been defeated)

North ♠ 843 ♥ J72 ♦ K9432 ♣ A4		East ♠ QJ6 ♥ QT85 ♦ T ♣ QJT95
West ♠ KT72 ♥ K94 ♦ J876 ♣ 86		South ♠ A95 ♥ A63 ♦ AQ5 ♣ K732

These deals are showing you that you can often deal with opponents' high cards by **finessing** against them.

This technique prevents an opponent's high card from becoming a winner, but it helps if you know the location of the opposition's cards.

Remember the crucial rule of leading **through** the opponent with a critical card.



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These hands practise spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

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

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 1 SA
 Date: 21/06/2014
 Dealer: North
[Play this hand online!](#)
 Contract: 3N
 By: South
 Board #: 5
 Vulnerable: None

Lead: ♦ 5

Ah, the satisfaction of yet another well-played hand.

You reach 3NT, bidding along a well-worn pathway. West leads the ♦5, which is probably the fourth-highest card from a long suit.

You can count seven top tricks (two Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and three Clubs). The Club suit should provide two more provided that they break 3-2 – so there may well be nine easy tricks.

You may as well run the Diamond lead round to your ♦J at trick one (you never know...) but East takes the ♦K and returns the suit to the ♦A.

Now you must test the Clubs by playing the ♠A Q (*play the high cards from the short suit first*) hoping for both defenders to follow to two rounds. That hope is short-lived when you see East show out on the second round.

However, now you know where the ♠J is you should realize that it is trapped *underneath* dummy's ♠K 10 and can be finessed. Note that if **East** had started with four Clubs he could not be denied a Club trick. You can deal with a 4-1 break but not a 1-4 break... (if you see what we mean).

You play the ♣4 from the closed hand *through* West's remaining ♣J 9 and wait patiently for your opponent to choose a card. When he plays the ♣9 you cover that with the ♣10, certain that it will win the trick. The ♠K picks off West's remaining Club (the ♠J) and the ♣6 remains as the only Club in town – and hence is a boss.

Dummy's long Club gives you your sixth trick then you run for home by cashing the ♠A K and ♥A to make your contract.

You succeed on this hand by Counting, Planning and then staying alert as you execute. Noticing the Clubs splitting 4-1 you use the *marked finesse* to pick up West's ♠J and still avoid losing a trick in Clubs.

You can pretty much do this in your sleep now, can't you? Perfect practice makes perfect performance. Go team!

North		
♠ K3		
♥ 942		
♦ A42		
♣ KT632		
West		East
♠ J6		♠ Q9872
♥ KJ7		♥ QT63
♦ QT65		♦ K97
♣ J975		♣ 8
South		
♠ AT54		
♥ A85		
♦ J83		
♣ AQ4		

We once saw a bridge teacher dress in a cheerleader outfit and have the students chant "*High card from the short side first!*"

Eventually they got the idea. You will too. The purpose is to avoid **blocking** the suit.

