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These hands continue practising spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

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

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

Lead: ♦ Q



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North		
♠ K2		
♥ J654		
♦ 764		
♣ AT43		
West		East
♠ J93		♠ T8654
♥ Q		♥ KT973
♦ QJT95		♦ K8
♣ J985		♣ 7
South		
♠ AQ7		
♥ A82		
♦ A32		
♣ KQ62		

The dictionary definition of a finesse is: *"Gaining power for lower ranking cards by taking advantage of the favorable 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, and 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 neutralize 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.

It is also one of the most over-used and badly-used techniques, but that's a story for another day.

Here in Hand 1 we just have to pull in four tricks in our main suit. How might we go about that?

You reach 3NT after opening 1♣ and rebidding 2NT over a 1♥ response. West leads the ♦Q on which East *unblocks* his ♦K. This defense only makes sense if East has a doubleton (or singleton) King; in any case, West has led from a long suit headed by the ♦Q J 10.

You can count eight top tricks (three Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and three Clubs). If Clubs break 3-2 that suit will give you the ninth trick.

You also have a chance if Clubs break 4-1 with **West** having four. Your plan is to play off the ♠K Q, notice whether East shows out on the second round and, if he does, finesse West for ♣J on the third round. You should realize that you have no chance of four Club tricks if East started with ♣J 9 × ×. With that holding your right-hand opponent can sit and wait – you have no play to take all the Club tricks.

This is the play.

You win the ♦Q lead in hand with the ♦A. Next you 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 Clubs on the table (the ♠A 10) would be winners.

When East shows out on the second round you know that Clubs are actually 4-1 but that doesn't worry you. You know that West has the ♣J 9 remaining on your left. You play the ♣2 from the closed hand *through* your forlorn victim on your left and wait to see what he does. When West plays the ♣9 you are able to win with dummy's ♣10. Next comes the ♠A which drops the last remaining Club, the ♣J.

You now have five tricks and you proceed to

make four more – and your contract – by cashing the three top Spades and the ♥A.

You succeed in this contract because you think about what might go wrong when Counting and Planning. You need to play Clubs carefully just in case they break 4-1, but in a manner you can deal with.



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VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East	
♠ AK65	♥ Q73	♠ J2	♥ T8654
♦ 8	♣ A9632	♦ T953	♠ KQ
West		South	
♠ Q984	♥ KQJ76	♠ T73	♥ AKJ92
♦ T854		♦ 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? Visualizing the order in which you play is the winning strategy.

In this hand the key to success is **Counting your tricks**

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

Lead: D

You reach 4♥ having shown a minimum opening bid. West has an easy lead of the ♠K, which can only be from a suit headed by the ♠KQ.

As ever, we count losers and see one Spade (hopeless), two Diamonds (one of which can be *trumped* in dummy) and one Club. We also must count winners. We 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; you 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, you win the ♠A, 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 your first play in the suit.

You may well blink when West shows out of Hearts (a 5-0 break is a rarity, after all) but should realize that it doesn't much matter. In fact, it doesn't matter at all. You know exactly where the remaining trumps are and you 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 plays a low card (he has no winning option) you can win the ♥9 from the closed hand and can then draw the rest of the trumps – all of them.

The hard work is over and the rest is just routine housework. You simply cash your Heart, Club and Spade winners to make your contract.

Success comes from **not** drawing trumps until you have ruffed a Diamond on the table, then playing trumps carefully by starting with the ♥Q. When you see that the trumps are 5-0 you can then *finesse* against East neutralizing his long trump suit.

Remember, if you've decided to employ a **ruff losers** strategy, you will usually need to postpone pulling trumps. If you're going to **dump losers** on a long suit in dummy, it's just the opposite. Pull Their teeth (er, trumps) before they can cut you with them.



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These hands continue practising spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

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

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

Lead: ♥Q

You pick up a balanced 19 count (5-3-3-2 hands count as being balanced) and open the bidding with your longest suit, 1♣. You rebid 2NT over partner's 1♠ response – to show that you were too strong to open a 15-17 point 1NT – and partner has enough to raise that to game.

West (your left hand opponent) leads the ♥Q, probably the top of a sequence. You can count six *top tricks* (two Hearts, a Diamond, and three Clubs). We can collect another one from either the ♠K or ♠Q.

Normally, with the 68% chance of a 3-2 split in Clubs, we would plan on five Club tricks, but this isn't our rodeo. Our plan is to take trick one in our hand with the ♥K, keeping the other Heart stopper in dummy as an entry.

At trick two, we tackle the Clubs. So far so good, although West's play of the ♠10 gets our attention. So high so soon? Trick three shows the lie (lay?) of the land: the Bad Split. Hmmm. Plan B to the rescue.

We are going to need to get to dummy to lead a Club *through* East, the victim with the missing honor card, to make the ♣9, good. We cannot afford to use the ♥A as our entry to dummy, as that would blow our last stopper. So! We are going to set up a Spade while we've still got the Heart stopper.

When we throw down the ♠K as bait and East gobbles it up, we see the wisdom of our plan. East's return of a Heart puts us on the table with the ♥A.

Next we lead a Club, giving East a problem with no solution. When he plays low we know that we can play the ♣9, a classic *marked finesse*, certain that it will win the trick and allow us to wrap up five Club tricks. *Et voila!* We take five Club tricks, one Diamond, two Hearts and one Spade. We are the cat's meow.

North
 ♠ Q9653
 ♥ A62
 ♦ JT
 ♣ 753

West
 ♠ T72
 ♥ QJT73
 ♦ K963
 ♣ T



East
 ♠ AJ8
 ♥ 84
 ♦ Q854
 ♣ 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 (oh, what a surprise!) while preserving a stopper and creating an entry.

Never lose sight of your target number of tricks.



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These hands continue practising spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

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

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

Lead: S

You pick up a balanced 18 count and open 1♣, rebidding 2NT over partner's 1♦ response to show your shape and strength (18-19 points).

Partner has enough values with a decent five-card Diamond suit to raise you to game.

West leads the ♠K, which is probably the top of a sequence, and you can count seven top tricks (a Spade, a Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs). You need the Diamonds to behave in friendly fashion so you win the first trick with the ♠A in the closed hand and then test the key suit.

You play the ♦Q from hand (*play the high cards from the short suit first*) and East on your right plays an unexpected ♦J on this. You now have all the top Diamonds except the ♦10.

If the ♦J were East's only Diamond you could safely finesse twice through West by running the ♦9 but if the ♦J were subterfuge by East a finesse would be catastrophic. Be quite clear that a wily opponent could easily have started with ♦J 10 or even ♦J 10 x. Not all your opponents are sea-green incorruptibles, you know... it is fair to say that some simply cannot be trusted (!)

To clear up the position you must lead the ♦9 from the closed hand (playing the ♦4 blocks the suit later) and overtake it in the dummy with the ♦A. If East were to follow suit on this you will know that he is a sly old fox, never to be believed again.

As the cards lie, East shows out on this second round but this 4-1 split is good news. It allows you to make five Diamond tricks – the same result as if the suit split 3-2 – because it marks West with the ♦10 5 and you are able to pick up the ♦10 with a textbook **marked finesse**. You do this by coming back to hand with the ♣A then leading the ♦4 from the closed hand *through* West, trapping the ♦10. West has no winning option when you lead the ♦4 – playing a low Diamond or a high Diamond is equally futile.

After cashing the Diamonds all you have to do

is tidy up your room. That involves cashing the ♥A and the ♠K to make your contract.

Nice job. Two more to go, and you'll be ready for Prime Time.

North
♠ 54
♥ 854
♦ AK876
♣ 632

West
♠ KQJ98
♥ 97
♦ T532
♣ Q5



East
♠ T76
♥ KQ632
♦ J
♣ J984

South
♠ A32
♥ AJT
♦ Q94
♣ AKT7

Once again you must bid a balanced hand too strong to open 1NT. But you've got the perfect bid for that!

Then there's the matter of Karma. The gods of bridge deal you a bad break... or do they?



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These hands continue practising spotting and taking a 'Marked Finesse'

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

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse SA
 Date: 21/06/2014
 Dealer: North
[Play this hand online!](#)
 Contract: 2N
 By: South
 Board #: 5
 Vulnerable: E / W

Lead: ♠K

North opens 1♥, which he could do with a variety of hands. When you respond 1NT, showing 6-9 points, partner raises you to 2NT, inviting you to go to 3NT if you are at the top of your range. With only 7 points and largely useless intermediate cards you Pass.


West leads the ♠K, probably the top of a sequence. You can count seven *top tricks* (a Spade, a Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs) so it looks like you need the Diamonds to behave by breaking 3-2. You win the first trick with the ♠A in the dummy and then test the Diamonds by leading small to the ♦A in your own hand.

West drops the ♦J on this trick. 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 you will be able to take a *marked finesse* against the ♦10 in East's hand on the third round.

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

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

You polish matters off by taking the ♠A K and the ♥A for your requisite eight tricks. Job done.

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 make your contract. But what else is new?



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

VB#16 Y1 The Marked Finesse Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

Lead: ♠ J

Partner opens 1♥ with a 17 count and 2-5-3-3 shape. When you respond with the jack-of-all-trades 1NT, showing 6-9 points, partner rebids 2NT, inviting you to go to 3NT if you are at the top of your range. With 8 points and a five-card suit you accept the invitation and bid 3NT.

West prefers to lead the ♠J, the top of a sequence, to a Club from a broken suit. You can count six *top tricks*, these being: one Spade, three Hearts, and two Diamonds and it looks like this will be a close run thing.

Looking at the play in more detail you see that you may as well try the ♠Q 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 you may have held of making a second Spade trick by covering with the ♠K.

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

West – on your left – drops the ♦Q on the Ace and that looks like being a singleton, in which case East will be left with ♦10 6 5 and you can pick them up with a *marked finesse*.

However, you are able to check the Diamond layout before taking the finesse. There is no trusting the perfidy of bridge players! So you play the ♦2 from dummy to the ♦K in the closed hand. This confirms that West is now out of Diamonds (as expected) and so you go back to dummy using the ♥A as an entry to play the ♦7 *through* East's remaining ♦10 6.


Can you 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 defense. When he plays the ♦6 you overtake the ♦7 with the ♦8 and surgically remove East's remaining Diamond with your 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. You can cash the remaining Diamond winner and then the ♥K Q in dummy to secure your contract and throw the scraps to the dogs.

And now you are ready for Prime Time. You've worked through two sets of six hands of trial and trouble, facing more bad splits than you'll see in weeks of regular play. A final thought. Often it costs you nothing to take insurance against a bad split. Hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

Go forth and write home often.

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

Another opportunity to clean up if you can bring a suit home after another "interesting" split. You can do this in your sleep!