

THINKING THROUGH THE PLAY (SAFE AND DANGER HANDS)

	♠ A 10 9 ♥ Q 7 6 2 ♦ K Q 10 9 5 ♣ A		
♠ 7 3 2 ♥ J 8 ♦ A 2 ♣ Q J 10 7 3 2	♠ Q J 8 6 ♥ A K 4 ♦ 8 6 3 ♣ K 9 4	♠ K 5 4 ♥ 10 9 5 3 ♦ J 7 4 ♣ 8 6 5	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♣
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT

Partner led the ♣Q, won by dummy's Ace.

Even if the spade finesse works, you still have only 8 tricks unless the ♠K comes down in 2 or 3 rounds,. So, your plan should always involve working on diamonds. Which suit should you work on first?

You have to work through whether to finesse spades first or to work on diamonds.

If you take the spade finesse and it fails, then you will go down whenever West holds the ♦A.

On the other hand, if you cross to hand to lead a diamond towards dummy with East winning the Ace, you can duck one club, then win. If the second top diamond doesn't bring down the Jack, you can then try the spade finesse. If it fails, you hope that East is out of clubs.

If the diamond to dummy wins, now you have the extra trick, so can take the spade finesse in safety, with the ♠K still intact.

At our table, declarer tried the spade finesse first. When it failed, the club return removed his stopper. He now had 3 spade tricks, 3 heart tricks and 2 club tricks, but partner could win any diamond lead and cash her clubs, for one off.

You should now be adept at the next hand:

♠ Q 10 2
♥ A 5 4
♦ A J 10 9 4
♣ 4 3

♠ K J 4
♥ K 8
♦ Q 8 6 2
♣ A K 10 8

South is playing in 3NT, and West leads the ♥Q.
This is the sort of hand that which is all too easy to misplay.

Since you are safe from any other suit, it is perfectly fine to duck trick 1. You win the heart continuation and have to find the best line of play. Most people would take the diamond finesse. However, do you have enough tricks if the diamond finesse fails? You will then have 2 heart, 4 diamond and 2 club winners: not enough. If the diamond finesse fails and West holds the ♠A, you will go down.

You must play spades first.

No matter who has the ♠A, this ensures your contract, assuming West has the long hearts. If the ♠A is taken, you win a heart return, cross to your hand, then take the diamond finesse. If the finesse fails and hearts are 5-3, East has no hearts remaining. If the finesse fails and hearts are 4-4, you lose 2 hearts, 1 spade and 1 diamond.

If the ♠A is ducked, you already have your ninth trick, so can revert to the diamond finesse.

However, if you take the diamond finesse first and it fails, then East returns the third heart. Now when West proves to have the ♠A, you go down.

On this hand, you need to check how many tricks you have should the finesse fail. By doing so, you should find the correct line. *You want to take the finesse to the 'safe hand' WHEN it is safe, not earlier.*

However, let's change the hand around:

♠ Q 10 2
♥ A 5 4
♦ Q 8 6 4
♣ K 4 3

♠ K J 4
♥ K 8
♦ A J 10 9 2
♣ A 10 9

Once again, South is in 3NT on the lead of ♥Q, ducked, but with South winning the second round of hearts.

However, this time West is your danger hand later – so you actually need to remove his potential entry immediately. That entry is the finesse, rather than the ♠A. (If he has both ♠A and the ♦K, you will go down anyway.)

If you play on spades and East wins the ♠A, but then the diamond finesse fails, you will go down. On the other hand, if you take the diamond finesse and it fails, then when you play on spades, East either has no hearts remaining (they were 5-3) or the hearts break 4-4, leaving you with your 9 tricks again.

So, keep thinking about which hand is dangerous – and ‘when’.

Double check your line of play in your head, checking the order in which you should work your options.

Barbara Travis

www.bridgewithbarbara.com