

HOW WOULD YOU PLAY? (3)

♠ 4 3 2
♥ Q 7 3 2
♦ 6 5
♣ A K 6 5

♠ A 6 5
♥ A K 4
♦ A Q 4 3
♣ Q 3 2

You are in 3NT. West leads the ♠ K which you should duck (East discouraging), followed by the ♠ Q which you also duck, all following to both rounds of spades. The ♠ J comes next, all follow, and you win the Ace. You now know that spades are dividing 4-3, with West more likely to hold the length.

You have eight top tricks. Options for your additional trick include:

- (a) Hearts breaking 3-3
- (b) Clubs breaking 3-3
- (c) The diamond finesse, hoping East holds the ♦ King

This hand is about working your way through your options. You firstly start by testing the hearts or clubs – let's work with clubs first – but, no matter what, you plan to 'finish' the suit in dummy. You cash three rounds of clubs, ending in dummy. On the third round, East shows out. Now you try the hearts. On the second round, West shows out. You can still lead to the ♥ Q in dummy, with West discarding two diamonds on the hearts.

So, now you are down to "Plan C" – or are you? Have you been counting? West started with 4 spades, 4 clubs and 1 heart. So now you know West had a 4-1-4-4 (unless East has the fourth spade, which seems unlikely).

You have already lost two tricks. If you take the diamond finesse and it fails, you will lose another three tricks – the ♦ K, the thirteenth spade and the winning club. Have you found the winning line yet?

You are in dummy, so you can exit to West with the club. West will be able to cash his club and spade winners (two tricks), but will then have to lead a diamond back to your ♦ A-Q, effectively giving you the finesse, rather than having you take the finesse.

You have reached this position (*see next page*):

♠ --	
♥ 7	
♦ 6 5	
♣ 5	
♠ 10	<i>irrelevant</i>
♥ --	
♦ K x (or x x)	
♣ J	
♠ --	
♥ --	
♦ A Q 4 3	
♣ --	

The club exit puts West on lead. With West on lead, your contract is assured. You discard two small diamonds on the black suit winners, then West gives you the diamond finesse. It doesn't matter who holds the ♦K, but you are no longer dependent on the finesse.

On this hand, it is a matter of counting. Once you work out West's hand shape, you can find this play. Train yourself to count – admittedly, that is easier said than done, but you MUST practise doing so if you want to improve your card play.

Elimination plays are not as frequent in No Trumps contracts as with trump contracts but are just as effective. You are finding a way to avoid a finesse, ensuring your contract. However, to execute an elimination play (or strip and endplay, you have to be able to count out the shape of the hand.

Here's another example. This was my daughter Lauren's first endplay, in 2009 when she was 16!

♠ Q J 8 7 5	
♥ Q 8 7 5	
♦ K 6	
♣ Q 10	
♠ K 9 3	♠ A 10 4
♥ 10 4 3 2	♥ A K J
♦ 4 3	♦ Q J 8 5
♣ A K 7 6	♣ 5 3 2
♠ 6 2	
♥ 9 6	
♦ A 10 9 7 2	
♣ J 9 8 4	

Lauren declared 3NT from the East seat. The ♦7 was led by South, taken with North's ♦K. A diamond was continued and South allowed Lauren's ♦Q to hold the trick. (*South – wrongly - was hoping that this would keep communications open for when North won a trick later.*) A club was led to dummy's ♣K, and a successful finesse of the ♥J followed. Lauren cashed the two top hearts, on the second of which South discarded a spade. Lauren continued a spade to dummy's ♠K, and cashed the ♣A. Now a spade to the ♠A saw South discard a diamond and bring about this ending:

	♠ Q J 8	
	♥ Q	
	♦ --	
	♣ --	
♠ 9		♠ 10
♥ 10		♥ --
♦ --		♦ J 8
♣ 7 6		♣ 5
	♠ --	
	♥ --	
	♦ A 10	
	♣ J 9	

Lauren exited with a club and South had to concede the last trick to declarer's ♦J, and Lauren had brought off her first-ever endplay.

Lauren had never counted out a hand before. She knew North's hand shape (5 spades, 4 hearts, so 2 diamonds and 2 clubs), and then had to re-work counting out South's hand shape. *(Don't worry – that took her quite some time!)*

Additional comments:

South ducked his partner's diamond return at trick 2, hoping his partner would regain the lead and be able to lead another diamond to his winning suit. This was a good play in isolation, however, given that Lauren played the ♦5 at trick 1, the return of the ♦6 revealed either a doubleton or four diamonds in North's hand. After all, one is supposed to return the top card of an original 3-card holding, and the ♦6 was now the lowest remaining diamond, indicating either two or four. Therefore, South should have won trick 2, which would have prevented the endplay (South would have held the ♦10-9 in the end-position).

When South had to discard on the third heart, he discarded a spade, which gave Lauren a full count of the hand. It seemed like that was an error, because it did allow Lauren to work out the hand shapes, however if he had discarded a club the club suit would have provided the ninth winner.

Don't worry – it took a lot more years for her to manage another endplay! The point is that you have to be able to count, and then you'll realise that much of your play is about counting, in defence as well. I notice that many of my defensive errors occur when I fail to count – whether it is declarer's hand shape or HCP.

Barbara Travis

www.bridgewithbarbara.com