

BRIDGE – BEGINNER’S LESSONS III – 26

Declarer Play - Planning the Play of the Hand

Finesses

Definition: To “finesse” is an attempt to win a trick with a card that is not a sure winner. It is usually accomplished with an honor. It operates by forcing one Opponent to commit a card before you do, thereby isolating the other Opponent as the only Defender with an opportunity to top your possible winner.

If you play a spot card up toward an AQ combination and second hand commits a low card to the trick, you can finesse with the Queen, which will win whenever the second Player, rather than the fourth one, holds the King.

Three Basic Ways to Finesse:

A. You lead a spot card up to one or more honors in the opposite hand. Always play from the weaker holding toward the stronger holding. Try to take the trick by playing one of the lesser honors that the last-to-play Opponent might not be able to beat.

With Kx opposite xx, if you would have led first from the hand with the Kx, you will always lose two tricks, whether you lead the King and lose to the Ace now, or lead the spot card and lose the King to the Ace later. By leading a spot card toward the Kx, however, you will win a trick, whenever the second hand holds the Ace.

B. You lead an honor toward one or more higher honors in the opposite hand. Never lead an honor, unless you have a sufficient number of touching honors to back up the lead, because, if the honor led is covered by a higher honor from the second Player, you will be forced to contribute another, yet higher, honor in order to win the trick, thereby “wasting” two honors on the same play.

With Qx opposite Axx, if you start by leading the Queen, correct defense will always hold you to one trick with the Ace. Either the Queen will be covered by the King from second hand or be lost to the King in fourth hand. Lacking the Jack, you should lead a spot card up to the Queen, hoping that the second hand holds the King.

Whenever you lead an honor in order to finesse, you need an extra honor in your combined holding to win potentially as many tricks as you might have won, if all your honors had been located in just one hand. If the lead is not covered by second hand, try to win the trick by letting the lead “ride”, i.e., by playing low as third hand.

With AQJ opposite xxx, you can win up to three tricks by finessing twice against the King, but with QJx opposite Axx, you can never win three tricks legitimately by trying the finesse. If you lead the Queen and it is covered by the second Player, you will be forced to use up two of your honors on the same trick. You would need an extra honor in the latter case, namely, the Ten, to have an honest play for three tricks.

C. The Opponents lead the suit for you. If possible, let the Opponents lead the suit. This gives you two chances to play to the trick as both second and fourth hand, whereas your Opponents would have only one chance remaining. Try to win either by playing a card that the next Opponent might not be able to beat or by letting the lead ride around to an honor in your “*last-to-play*” hand.

With AJx opposite KTx, if you were to play the suit yourself, you would have to guess the location of the Queen in order to make three tricks. If, however, the Opponents lead the suit and you play low as second hand, you are guaranteed to make three tricks as their leading the suit has given you a “free finesse.”

Types of Finesses

1. The Simple Finesse: A simple finesse involves a combination of cards in a particular suit that is missing just one honor to form a solid sequence of honors. It is an attempt to establish one of the lesser honor cards (i.e., one that ranks below the missing honor) as a winner.

Examples: (AQ opposite xx) (Qxx opposite Axx)

Basic Conditions for Success:

- a. The lead must come from the proper side of the table.
- b. The Opponent holding the missing honor must play second to the trick.

2. The Double (Deep) Finesse: A double finesse is a play that involves a broken sequence of honors, missing exactly two of them to form a solid sequence. A double finesse is one against two missing honors. Like the simple finesse, the double finesse is designed to establish at least one of the lesser honor cards as a winner. Unlike the simple finesse, it usually requires two finessing-type plays, before you can generate an extra trick.

Examples: (AJT opposite xxx) (AKT9 opposite xxx)

How the Double Finesse Works:

- a. Mechanically, the double finesse operates like the simple finesse, by leading through an Opponent’s hand up to one of your honor combinations, except that usually it must be done twice.
- b. Since you are missing two honors, the first finesse has two chances to lose and thus is likely to do so. A failed first finesse, however, reduces the second play to nothing more than a simple finesse against the one remaining, missing honor.
- c. The only way the second finesse will also fail is for the fourth-hand Opponent to hold both missing honors, which is but a 24% chance. Therefore, the double finesse will produce at least one extra winner 76% of the time.

Other finesses, not discussed herein are the following:

- a. **The Continuing Finesse**
- b. **The Two-Way Finesse**
- c. **The Obligatory Finesse**
- d. **The Ruffing Finesse**
- e. **The Backwards Finesse**