

BRIDGE – INTERMEDIATE LESSON II - 16

Planning the Play of the Hand

The Percentage Play

Books have been written on specific percentage plays when planning Declarer play of the hand. For most of us, the thought of learning hundreds of different percentage combinations seems obscure and not, in any way, how we wish to spend our time. In reality, however, most of us cannot expect to learn or memorize all the odds available for the myriad number of different card combinations; but, knowledge of the *basic percentages* is not overwhelming, and can be important in improving one's Declarer play.

Basic Percentages

A. Absent any inferences available from the bidding **the success of any finesse working is, statistically, 50-50.** If one were to play to infinity, the chances of all the finesses taken would work one-half of the time. I know, you say, not for you - the last couple of finesses you took all failed, but statistically, at least, *finesses will work 50% of the time.*

B. In a separate issue, when an *even number of cards* in any suit are held jointly by the Opponents, they are statistically, most often, likely to be split *oddly*, and when an *odd number of cards* in any suit are held by the Opponents, they are statistically likely, most often, to be split *evenly*. Thus, in percentage terms, when missing an *even number of cards*, the likelihood of them being *split oddly* is *greater than 50%*; and when missing an *odd number of cards*, the likelihood of them being *split evenly* is also *greater than 50%*. In actual percentage terms, the statistical likelihood, as shown above, is actually *68% of the time.*

So, absent any bidding by the Opponents which might impact the statistical odds, if you, as Declarer, have a choice of taking either a finesse, which will likely work 50% of the time, or playing for a 3-2 break when the Opponents hold 5-pieces of any significant suit, a break which will work 68% of the time, choose the latter over the former. *See the following example:*

87 Against your 4-Spade contract, the defense cashes three Diamond
AK432 tricks and at trick four, leads a Club through your **AQ**. Assuming
752 there is no inference available from the bidding or the play to the
864 first three tricks, how should South, the Declarer, proceed in order to
maximize his/her chances for success in making the stated **4S** contract?

AKQJT The Club finesse is **50%** likely to succeed, but the chance that
Q98 the Hearts will split 3-2 is **68%**. Win the Ace of Clubs, draw the
984 Opponent's outstanding Trumps and hope that the Hearts split is 3-2, the
AQ statistical likelihood. Assuming that they do split as predicted, the
losing Club Queen can then be discarded on the established Heart winners!

Summation

If the Opponents hold 3, 5 or 7 cards in any suit of interest, they rate to split 2-1, 3-2, or 4-3, respectively. The odds of this are greater than 50%, and so there is a greater chance of finding a favorable split than there is of finessing, assuming that one has a choice. Alternatively, if you, as Declarer, are missing 4 or 6 cards (hoping for a 2-2 or 3-3 break), it is less than 50% likely, since they are rated to split oddly. So, under these circumstances, if you have a choice between an even break and a possible finesse, take the finesse.

There are occasions when, as Declarer, you have the option and the timing to take two different avenues of play in order to make your contract, notwithstanding the odds of one avenue having a greater percentage of likely success than the other.

--- For example, you are in a No-Trump contract and need 5-tricks from
 --- these two suits. If the Diamonds are split 3-3, you have 4-tricks in the
AK94 Diamond suit plus the Ace of Clubs. If, alternatively, the King of
7 Clubs is onside, you can finesse, taking two Club tricks and
 three top Diamond tricks.

--- Here, you have the option of trying both. You would try the
Q85 Diamonds first. If they split, you claim. If they don't, you can fall
AQ back on the Club finesse -- testing both methods, using the second as an
 alternate fall-back option, should the first method fail.

But, suppose, alternatively, you are not on lead. What if your RHO is on lead, in this position and leads a Club? Assuming there is nothing to go by from the bidding or early play, you should finesse (50% likely) rather than relying on a 3-3 break in the Diamond suit (less than 50% likely).

 Unquestionably, hands and circumstances vary; but, planning the play of the following hands and reasoning through the available information as you play is likely to serve to develop and solidify the kind of logical thinking necessary to use percentage information to maximize Declarer results.

Practice Hands Using These Concepts

<p>(1) AT9 <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u></p> <p>543 P 1-NT P</p> <p>T532 3-NT P P P</p> <p>AQ2</p> <p>West Leads the H2.</p> <p>J2 Plan your Declarer play!</p> <p>A97</p> <p>AKQJ6</p> <p>732</p>	<p>(2) A98 <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u></p> <p>AQ753 3S P</p> <p>864 4S P P P</p> <p>A2</p> <p>West leads the DQ.</p> <p>KQJT653 Plan your Declarer play!</p> <p>2</p> <p>973</p> <p>65</p>
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<p>(3) K2 <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u></p> <p>643 1-NT P</p> <p>A543 P 3-NT P P</p> <p>AQ86 P</p> <p>AJ West leads the S6.</p> <p>KQ5 Plan your Declarer play!</p> <p>KQJT</p> <p>7543</p>	
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Plan Your Declarer Play on Each of the Three Hands Listed Above

“Before”

Looking at the Next Pages!

Solution for Hand # 1

(1)	AT9 543 T532 AQ2 J2 A97 AKQJ6 732	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
			P	1-NT	P
		3-NT	P	P	P

West Leads the **H2**.
Plan your Declarer play to make 9-tricks!

Declarer, playing the hand in a No-Trump contract, should begin by counting the hand's "sure winning" tricks. They are 1-Club trick, 5-Diamond tricks, 1-Heart trick, and 1-Spade trick, for a total of 8-tricks, one short of the necessary nine needed to fulfill the stated **3-NT** contract.

Having confirmed from East that the Opponent's normal lead is 4th best against No-Trump contracts, Declarer can now infer that the lead of the **H2** implies that the Heart suit is divided **4-3-3-3**. Declarer, therefore, needs to hold up twice, taking the Ace of Hearts at trick #3, thereby exhausting East of any remaining Hearts and effectively cutting the defense's communication in the Heart suit. If and when East does get the lead at a latter trick, he/she cannot then harm Declarer, absent having a Heart with which to access West's remaining 13th Heart.

Having succeeded in severing the Heart suit communication, Declarer must now decide the best percentage play available in order to maximize the chance of developing the missing 9th trick. Is it with the Club suit, or with the Spade suit?

There is a 50% likelihood of success for the Club finesse to work. Alternatively, there is a greater percentage of likelihood for either the two missing Spade honors (the **K** and the **Q**), to be split, or for both of the Spade honors to be held by East, as opposed to both being held by West. Therefore, attacking the Spade suit by taking two Spade finesses holds a greater percentage chance of success in making the specified **3-NT** contract.

Declarer's line of play is, therefore, as follows: After breaking the Heart suit communication, Declarer now plays the Diamond suit until East shows out. Having succeeded in stripping East of any cards in both the Heart and Diamond suits, Declarer then takes a Spade finesse. Assuming this first Spade finesse loses to East's **SQ** or **SK**, East will now have no other choice but to return either a Spade or a Club, both giving Declarer the missing ninth trick, no matter which Opponent holds the second Spade honor or the missing King of Clubs.

The likelihood of success for the Club finesse was 50%. Two consecutive Spade finesses, however, held roughly a 75% chance for success. In addition, taking the Spade finesse twice, combined with the end-play just referenced, effectively produced a sure result. To have taken the Club finesse early would have been fatal, for if it were to have failed, East would win the trick and continue Clubs, leaving Declarer with the 8 tricks with which Declarer started, and no effective plan with which to secure the needed missing 9th trick.

	AT9	
	543	
K654	T532	Q873
KJ82	AQ6	Q76
874		9
54	J2	KJT98
	A97	
	AKQJ6	
	732	

Solution for Hand # 2

(2) A98	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
AQ753			3S	P
864	4S	P	P	P
A2				
	West leads the CQ .			
KQJT653	Plan your Declarer play!			
2				
973				
65				

Declarer, playing this hand in a Suit contract, begins by counting the hand's "sure losing" tricks, determined by using Declarer's hand as the Master Hand. The current sure-losers are 1-Club trick, and 3-Diamond tricks, for a total of 4-Losers, one more than Declarer can afford in order to make the stated **4S** contract.

With a Club lead, here, it is imperative for Declarer to realize that he/she cannot afford to give up the lead, and that he/she must win the first trick with the Club Ace. If Declarer does not, the Opponents, having won the first trick, can then proceed to switch suits and immediately capture three Diamond tricks, thereby defeating the contract.

Declarer's only hope is to eliminate the Club or one of the Diamond losers using Dummy's Heart suit. There are, however, two ways of dealing with the Heart suit. Finessing for the missing **HK** would hold a **50%** chance of success. However, the likelihood of the missing 7-Hearts to be split **4-3**, (an odd number of Hearts missing are rated to be split evenly), is **68%**. In addition, the Heart King could drop doubleton, or even lie **KXX**, which, in either case, would allow Declarer to make an overtrick. Counting on the missing Hearts to be split evenly, therefore, is the superior percentage approach over taking the finesse.

Declarer's line of play is, therefore, as follows: After taking the first trick with the **CA**, Declarer must then play the Heart Ace at trick #2. Then he/she must trump Dummy's **H3** with Declarer's **SK**, preserving a low Spade in Declarer's hand enabling later re-entry into the Dummy for a sluff of one of Declarer's losers. At trick four, Declarer re-enters the Dummy by playing a low Spade to Dummy's **S8**. Declarer then plays the **H3**, trumping it with Declarer's **SQ**. Declarer next re-enters the Dummy by overtaking another small Spade with Dummy's **S9**. The fourth Heart is then played from the Dummy and is trumped using South's **SJ**. Dummy's Hand is again re-entered by overtaking Declarer's **S6** with the last high Spade in Dummy, the **SA**. The Heart Queen has now been established as a winner upon which Declarer can sluff either the remaining Club loser or one of the Diamond losers, thus reducing the number of losing tricks to three, and insuring the contract.

The winning strategy here was not to draw Trumps (which would have eliminated the entries into Dummy), but, rather, to develop a Heart winner upon which a potential losing trick could be discarded. This was accomplished by ruffing three Heart tricks, by using Dummy's high Spades as entries, and the higher percentage play of assuming an even split of the missing 7-outstanding Hearts, as opposed to the 50%-likely Heart finesse.

	A98			
	AQ753			
42	864		7	
864	A2		KJT9	
AQJ			KT52	
QJT73			K984	
	KQJT653			
	2			
	973			
	65			

Solution for Hand # 3

(3)	K2 643 A543 AQ86 AJ KQ5 KQJT 7543	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
				1-NT	P
		P	3-NT	P	P
		P			
			West leads the S6.		
			Plan your Declarer play!		

Once again Declarer is in a No-Trump contract, and before playing to trick #1, he/she must count the "**sure winners**." There are 2-"**sure winners**" in the Spade suit, 4-"**sure winners**" in the Diamond suit, and the **CA**, for a total of 7-"**sure-winners**," two short needed to fulfill the 9-tricks required for the stated **3-NT** contract. If Declarer were to take the Club finesse first, and if it were to lose, the Opponents will play a second Spade trick, stripping Declarer of his/her last Spade stopper and ultimately setting the contract by winning the **CK**, the **HA**, and at least 3-Spade tricks.

Declarer's line of play is, therefore, as follows: Declarer must win the first Spade trick in the Dummy by taking trick # 1 with the **SK**, and then playing Dummy's **H3** towards his/her **H-KQ**. If Declarer's RHO holds the **HA**, Declarer will then have two Heart tricks which along with the original 7-"**sure winners**," will fulfill the stated **3-NT** contract. Even if the **HK** were to lose to East's **HA**, Declarer can still attempt the Club finesse as a back-up, at a later time, in order to achieve his/her missing ninth trick.

By playing the Heart suit first, Declarer creates two chances to make the stated contract; (1) the Ace of Hearts being on-side, and (2) the Club finesse.

	K2	
	643	
	A543	
	AQ86	
Q9865		T743
T872		AJ9
82		976
T2		KJ9
	AJ	
	KQ5	
	KQJT	
	7543	