Learning Points – 4 Ways to Play a Slam

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North
Deals
NS Vul
MPs

	♠	
	♥	
	♦	
	♣	

♠ K8		♠ A62
♥ K8	**N**	♥ A6
♦ K643	**W 13 E**	♦ AJ7
♣ AQ542	**S**	♣ J9876

VJ

	♠	Mike
	♥	
	♦	
	♣	

North	East	South	West
Pass	1♣	Pass	2♣[1]
Pass	3N[2]	Pass	4N[3]
Pass	5♦[4]	Pass	6♣

1 = 4(5)+♣s and 10+ HCP no 4cd Major
2 = Game opp. Min. opener, no side suit risk
3 = 1430 for ♣s
4 = 0 or 3 Keycards

West leads ♠5

Wednesday Night Holiday Party, Mr. John Altman Jr., Director. Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070. Mike Ma brought this interesting slam on a hand where the entire field, save 2 pairs played only in game.

Bidding 2 balanced minor suit-oriented hands in Matchpoints always makes stopping in a NT game desirable, given the disparity between minor suit and NT scoring. Sometimes this lulls us to sleep about slam. Mike Ma and V. J. Vadsudevan bid and made 6♣ on this hand. Would you? What's the best line for making 6♣ *a priori*?

The Bidding

West's 2♣ bid is an Inverted Minor Raise showing Invitational or better hand with at least 4 (likely 5+) ♣s and no 4-card Major. East rebid 3N showing game values opposite a minimum invitation. *(Note: Jumping to 3N usually shows 18-19 HCP and a balanced hand. Open 1 NT with 15-17 HCP. With 12-13 the rebid is 2NT. With 13-14 opener bids a side suit fragment as a game force).*

North
Deals
Both Vul
MPs

	♠ J943
	♥ Q10975
	♦ 1052
	♣ K

♠ K8		♠ A62
♥ K8	**N**	♥ A6
♦ K643	**W 13 E**	♦ AJ7
♣ AQ542	**S**	♣ J9876

	♠ Q1075	EW 6N; 6♦;
	♥ J432	6♣; 2♥; 1♠
	♦ Q98	
	♣ 103	

The Plan

The lead of the ♠5 posed no immediate threat. There are 2 possible finesses in the minor suits. What's the best line of play and likely probability of success?

Line 1: Eliminate the Majors from both hands, Cash Top ♦s, & Finesse ♣s.

(♦Qx)19% + ♣K 50% (64%) + 26%(16%)[Stiff ♣K & ♦xx w/East] = 55%. Not bad. Anything better than 50% is considered a good game in all forms of scoring. Is there a better plan? Let's look deeper.

Line 2: Cash the ♣A and if the ♣K does not fall, then rely on the ♦ finesse. The ♣K is singleton 26% so the odds appear to be

$$26\% + 50\% (100-26\%) = 26\% + 37\% = 63\%.$$

Line 3: play for 1 of 2 minor suit finesses. The odds of success are roughly 50% for the ♣ Finesse, + 48% of the remaining 50% for the ♦ finesse or 74%. The formal calculation: 50%+48%(100-50%) = 74%. (*Why 48% not 50%? When the ♣K is with North, then the ♦Q had 12 empty spaces in North compared to 13 in South for an a priori 48% chance to be with North. Count only significant cards*). ☺

Line 4: Look at the Major suits. We can eliminate them from both hands (at very low risk). Then cash the ♣A. We succeed whenever the ♣K is singleton or doubleton with South or failing that, the ♦ finesse wins. The success estimate is roughly:

26% (Singleton ♣K) + 26% (Doubleton ♣K with South) + 50% ♦Q(100-52%) = 76%

South	North	Cases	%
K103	-	1	11
K10	3	1	13
K3	10	1	13
K	103	1	13
103	K	1	13
10	K3	1	13
3	K10	1	13
-	K103	1	11
	TOTAL	8	100

Estimating the chance of success requires better information about how the ♣s might split. Missing K103, a suit can split in 8 cases (*for n missing cards, there are 2^n cases*). See Richard Pavlicek's web site for a great card combination analyzer: http://www.rpbridge.net/xcc1.htm

The Play

Line 4 (and Line 2) earns all the matchpoints on this hand. Sometimes competing lines start out with a similar sequence. Notice how the small difference among the two best lines (2%) made all the difference between making and not making! Making 6♣ was a top!

Post Mortem

Of 16 pairs, only 2 bid this sound small slam, 76% likely to succeed. Don't fall for the temptation to finesse when the right play is to avoid them entirely. **Line 4** avoids the trump finesse and creates a throw-in - the opponents will offer a major suit ruff/sluff so the ♦ suit can be played for no losers (pitch a ♦ from North, the hand short in ♦s, and ruff in the S hand) or South will lead a ♦ establishing 3 winners in the suit for declarer. Try it! Failing all of that, the ♦ finesse is still available. Talk about keeping all your chances alive…Here **Line 1** (55% - cash the short suit and finesse the long suit) failed, but **Line 2** (63% - cash the long suit and finesse the short suit) succeeds. ←
there is a lesson here. REPEAT. There is a lesson here.

When holding all but K10x (x not the 9) and having honors split between both hands, the right technique is to lead the Honor (Q or J) from the Aceless hand, **should you choose to finesse**. This guarantees no loser should the K10x lie onside. Try it! Note that the best play in one suit (♣s) is NOT the best play for the whole hand. ←
there is a lesson here. REPEAT. There is a lesson here.

Bidding this slam requires precise evaluation. Either West or East need to show extra values. West sees 5 AK points (A=2, K=1) and the ♣Q. East sees a maximum for a minimum balanced hand and 6 AK points. Only 10 AK points are needed for small slam.

Contract	Scores		Matchpoints	
	N-S	E-W	N-S	E-W
6 ♣ E	100		15.00	0.00
2 ♣ E		150	14.00	1.00
5 ♣ E		600	13.00	2.00
3 NT W		630	9.50	5.50
3 NT W		630	9.50	5.50
3 NT E		630	9.50	5.50
3 NT E		630	9.50	5.50
3 NT W		630	9.50	5.50
3 NT E		630	9.50	5.50
3 NT W		660	4.50	10.50
3 NT E		660	4.50	10.50
3 NT W		660	4.50	10.50
4 NT E		660	4.50	10.50
3 NT E		690	1.50	13.50
3 NT E		690	1.50	13.50
6 ♣ E		1370	0.00	15.00

Getting to a Minorwood or RKB should enable reaching 6♣ even without asking for the ♣Q. Why? **East** knows the ♣ fit is 10 cards (West knows only that ♣s are 8+). A 10 card fit holding both the ♣AK makes finding the ♣Q moot – that is, the chances of picking up the ♣Q or ♣Qx are 89%, very good indeed ☺.

Since there are only 29 HCP in the East West Hands, the focus is on 3N or a small suit slam, NOT 6N. A ruffing end play (ruff sluff or free finesse) adds extra chances when you have a trump suit and is often best when attempting a small slam holding less than 33 HCP.

Learning Points
1. Finding a good line of play is a good start. Dig deeper – there is a better one. Find it!
2. Note that the best play for tricks in any one suit is not necessarily the best play for making your contract! Think what does the HAND require.
3. When combining multiple finesses, if you need BOTH to work, your success is halved. If you need **either** of 2 finesses, the odds are 74% (finessing different hands) or 76% (finessing the same hand)

you will succeed. Always take the better odds line unless you play for a swing. If you need 2 of 3 finesses to work you are back to 50% (Try this yourself). See the simple solution below.

4. When facing 2 or more finesses and you can lose only once, you can improve your chances by playing for the drop in the longer suit and finessing in the shorter suit.

5. Be sure to look for a line of play that requires NO FINESSE at all. This will often be superior, even if by only a small margin.

6. Missing the K10x, Lead the J or Q toward the AQ or AJ. This protects against all 3 missing cards on-side.

7. A small slam with less than 33 HCP? Prefer a suit over NT unless you can count 12 tricks. Trump endplays often enable the 12th trick to appear as if by magic.

Keywords: Success probability, Strip and Throw In, Inverted Minor Raise, Card Combinations, Trick Sources, Lines of Play

Success Likelihood – 2 of 3 finesses:

Finesse 1	W	W	W	L	L	L	W	L
Finesse 2	W	W	L	W	L	W	L	L
Finesse 3	W	L	W	W	W	L	L	L

There are 2^3=8 possible outcomes from 3 finesses. Of these 4 have 2 or more wins and 4 have 1 or fewer wins. Therefore 4/8 = 50% of the time you will win 2 or more finesses.

Likewise 1/8 or 12.5 % of the time you will win all three or lose all 3.

If you only need 1 of 3 finesses, then you succeed 87.5% of the time.