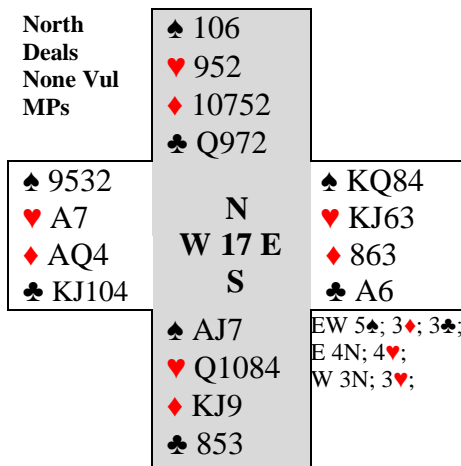


Learning Points – Avoid Practice Finesses

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Declarer Play Level: Basic / Intermediate



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A practice finesse is a finesse that does not improve your chances to make your contract. Practice finessses add risk and offer no reward. Here is a hand with 5 finessses. Which ones should you take and importantly when should you take them?

Having a choice of plays, pick the order that maximizes your chances on the entire hand (not just in a single suit). Pay attention to the cards as they fall. Discovery means keeping track of missing HCP & opponents' shape.

North	East	South	West
Pass	1♦ ¹	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			
1 = 11-15 HCP, at least 2♦s			
North leads ♠10			

The Bidding

Standard, 2/1 and Precision auctions converge. The only difference is in Precision East cannot have more than 15 HCP. The ♠ game was reached in short order. South's Pass in 4th seat with a 4333 11 HCP hand is appropriate.

The Play

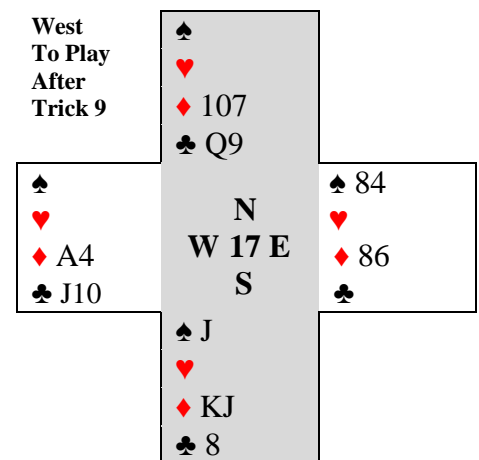
With 12 HCP opposite 14, declarer has several challenges. Declarer needs to develop 5 tricks before opponents get to 4. There are enough entries in both hands.

Declarer's Analysis:

- Top Winners:** 5 (0♠, 2♥, 1♦, 2♣).
- Losers:** 2-6 (1-2 ♠, 0-1 ♥, 1-2 ♦, 0-1♣)
- Trick Sources:**
 - 2♠, 3♥, 2♦, 3♣s → 4 finessses work (~6%)
 - 1♠, 2♥ & 2♥ Ruffs, 2♦, 2♣s & 2♣ Ruffs (~50%)

The ♠10 is passive, generally right when you a) expect declarer has to setup tricks in side suits or b) when you have to lead away from middle honors, risking the gift of a free finesse. In this case, the lead placed the ♠AJ with South. West put up dummy's ♠K and South won the ♠A. South switched to the ♦9. The ♦ finesse is one you would take anyway, though it would have been nicer if the opponents let you choose when to take it. Declarer inserts the ♦Q, winning. Now South is marked with the ♠AJ & ♦K – 8 HCP. Should we finesse in ♥ or ♠?

There's a chance that a Q will drop in the 3rd round. More importantly we might want to score 4 trump tricks by cross-ruffing (Line B). Declarer plays a trump to the ♠Q and both opponents follow. We have 2 trump losers. Which suit to ruff first? There is a small indication to ruff ♥s before ♣s. The internal strength of ♣s makes it a better suit for receiving a lead from defenders (think end-play) or taking the finesse in either direction (not so in ♥s). So, declarer plays 2 rounds of ♥s ending on the board then ruffs a small ♥. The ♥Q does not appear. Back to the table with a small ♣. The 4th ♥ (a discovery play) shows South with the ♥Q. We know South holds ♠AJ, ♥Q, ♦K or 10 HCP. It appears probable that North holds the ♣Q. If so, play a 2nd ♣ to the ♣A and lead the ♣J from hand. Ducking or covering, the opponents are done. If North ducks declarer discards a losing ♦ from the dummy. If North covers, declarer ruffs, and returns to hand in ♦s to play the now good ♣10 and pitch a losing ♦ from dummy.



4♠ making 5 ties for top score on this hand.

Post Mortem

Declarer settled on a losing ♠ finesse (for the ♠A), a winning ♦ finesse, and a winning ruffing finesse in ♣s to make an overtrick. The ♠&♦ finesses were a given. There is no better way to play ♠s.

Opponents forced the ♦ question early in the hand – a good defensive tactic: make declarer choose before s/he knows what's happening in the hand.

The ♣ finesse became more likely after discovering the strength in South's hand. With 12-13 HCP, South might have made a bid or expressed some doubt or discomfort during the bidding. Note the ♣ finesse is safe – that is, it is for an overtrick. If you lose the ♣ finesse you still make your contract.

The ♥ finesse and the ♣ finesse through South were practice finesses. If you took either of them, look again at the hand. Count your likely tricks and look to avoid risk that can't help you.

Learning Points

1. Just because you have many possible finesses don't plan to take them all. Finesses in different suits are independent. At 50% probability each additional finesse halves your chance of success. Take only those you must.
2. Ruffing out an honor is a good way to improve your odds of success instead of just finessing.
3. Stay in the game – count HCP and shape. You need this information.
4. When all other honors are in one opponent's hand, if the remaining key honor would give them an opening bid or an overcall and they didn't bid, they probably don't have it! Play the other opponent to hold the key honor.

Keywords: Plan the play, Don't Take Practice Finesses, Count Passed Hand HCP.