

Learning Points – Don't Finesse, Draw Trumps!

By Steve Moese. Edited by Mike Purcell

March 10, 2012

Competitive Bidding Level: Basic / Intermediate

West Deals EW Vul MPs	♠ K8 ♥ 87654 ♦ A75 ♣ K63	
♠ AQ65 ♥ KQJ109 ♦ 4 ♣ A74	N W 28 E S	♠ J10742 ♥ 2 ♦ K1092 ♣ QJ9
	♠ 93 ♥ A3 ♦ QJ863 ♣ 10852	

A/X Open Pairs, Qualifying, Indianapolis Regional Mike Ma is my partner. We play Precision.

Sometimes the cards hand you a tightrope – there is only one way to play and you have to stay on it to have a chance. Success can depend that declarer will make a minor error, or have a blind spot, with grave consequences.

The Bidding – West's 5-loser 16-count opens 1♥ and is worth a reverse in many partnerships: opposite either major, West's hand is worth 19-20 support points. When East responds in ♠s, a jump to 4♦ shows strength for game opposite most minimums, 4-card trump support, a singleton or void in ♦s, and both side suits stopped. East saw no need to bid on with 8 losers even with a 9-card trump fit.

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
4♦ ¹	Pass	4♠	All Pass

1=Splinter Raise
East leads ♦Q

The Play – South led the ♦Q, ignoring the ♥A3 (why set up opponent's suit for them)? North won the ♦A and saw the tight rope: a ♠ or ♣ back will not work, and a ♦ gives North a ♣ pitch. Out comes the ♥8 to South's ♥A. South can do no better than return the ♥3. There is an outside chance to score a ruff if partner

has the ♠K. Winning the 2nd ♥ in dummy was an error. Declarer sees a potential trump loser unless the ♠K is in South. Declarer tried to ruff a ♥ (hoping for a 4-3 split), only to be over ruffed by South. Ruffing the 3rd ♥ with a high trump is an improvement, but East has to do it twice if they take the losing ♠ finesse. Look closely. If South is ruffing ♥s, ruff the 2nd ♥ low! This allows for a losing ♠ finesse.. Down 1 was worth 14 of 17 MPs for North South. Making 4♠ would have been worth 12 MP of 17 for EW.

Post Mortem – If South led ♥A then ♥3 declarer would read the risk of a ♥ ruff. That would prompt ruffing ♥s HIGH when the trump finesse loses. Declarer should ruff the 2nd ♥ trick low. When the finesse fails and a ♥ comes back, simply ruff high, draw trumps, and claim the game. If declarer chooses to ruff the 3rd ♥ high and finesse trumps, they must lead small to the ♠Q and trumps must be 2-2. After ruffing high (♠J), leading the ♠10 for the losing finesse lets South win a ♥ ruff (trump promotion). Playing IMPs, cash the ♠A and lead a small ♠. You always make 4♠.

		NS	EW	N-S MPs	E-W MPs
4♠	E		450	0	17
4♠	E	50		14	3
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	W	50		14	3
2♠	E		140	9.5	7.5
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	E	50		14	3
3♠	E		140	9.5	7.5
3♠	E	50		14	3
4♠	E	50		14	3
4♠	E	50		14	3
4♠	E		420	4.5	12.5
4♠	W	50		14	3
4♠	W		420	4.5	12.5

Learning Points

1. On opening lead, attack strongly bid games, but don't give declarer tempo by cashing Aces in their long suits.
2. If on lead and 3 suits are risky, lead the 4th suit. Do it!
3. Make it easy for declarer to do the wrong thing!
4. When declaring, and opponents lead your strong long suit, expect a ruff and prepare counter measures. Avoid your blind spots.
5. Never lead the splinter suit – that trick is not going anywhere. Find somewhere to attack profitably. All else, lead a trump.

Keywords: Splinter Bid, Opening Lead, Tightrope, Safe Switch.