

# Combine Your Chances

Level: Basic to Intermediate

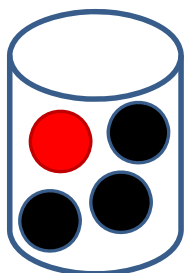


Simple ways you can improve planning your play and make the most of your contracts.

Cincinnati Bridge Association  
*Learning Points*<sup>®</sup>  
Steve Moese Mike Purcell

 Cincinnati  
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## Odds and Probability



1 in 4 **red**  
3 to 1 **black**  
25% red  
75% black

**Counting**  
**Random – Unbiased**  
**No Information**



Flipping an honest coin  
50% Heads  
50% Tails  
Each flip is **INDEPENDENT**.  
Flipping 8 tails in a row is unlikely:  
 $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = 0.39\%$

Joe flips a coin 8 times and gets 8 tails.  
What's the likelihood Joe gets tails on the 9<sup>th</sup> coin flip?

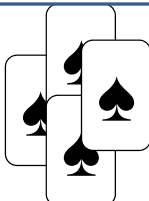
LHO Preempts 3♥, Assume they hold 7♥s.

Vacant Spaces says odds are 13 to 6 that a key honor is w/RHO.

LHO has 6 and RHO has 13 vacant Spaces (adjust for your ♥ s)

**INSANITY:** Repeat  
the same mistake  
& expect a better  
result.

Joe picks 4 cards from a normal deck of 52 cards and they are all ♠s. What's the chance Joe will pick a ♠ on the 5<sup>th</sup> card?



Odds can **DEPEND** on what has happened so far... If the deck is random, then the odds are 9/48 or 18.75% that the next card is a spade and 81.25% that the next card is another suit.

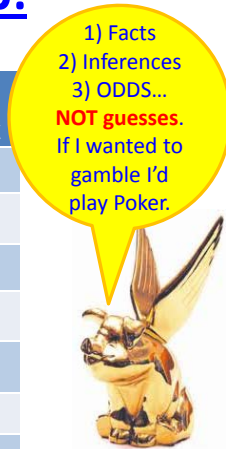


# Common Bridge Odds

## Suit Splits

## A, K, Q Drop:

# Cards Missing	Split	0	1	2	3	4	Honor	Hx	Hxx
2	48	52	<b>Remember Symmetry</b>				52	48	
3	22	78					26	52	22
4	10	50	40				12	41	37
5	4	28	68				6	27	41
6	1.5	14.5	48	36			2.4	16	36
7	0.5	7	30.5	62			1	9	27
8	0.2	2.8	17	47	33		0.4	4	18



There are 2<sup>n</sup> ways to distribute "n" cards between opponents.

Even split **ODDLY**  
Odd splits **EVENLY**

# Suit Combinations

A432    A5432    A32    KQJ2    KJ83    AJ1032  
 Q1056    Q1098    Q10954    543    A54    54

AQ543    AQ943    KQ1032    J92    J82    K32  
 J972    J7652    54    K7    A963    456

**Suits they should lead 1<sup>st</sup>**  
 AJ10    K32    Q7  
 K32    Q65    J32

**Best play depends on:**  
 1) The Entire Hand and  
 2) # Tricks Needed



For more see the Official ACBL Encyclopedia of Bridge, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed., pp. 507-556

# Card Combinations

5

- ACBL Bridge Encyclopedia - 50 pages on card combinations.
- Best play depends on the # tricks needed.
- Know MISSING CARDS & suit split odds.
- Know what split to manage

## KQJ2 543

Missing A109876  
Any A onside or 3-3  
*Lead 3 times to KQJ*  
3 Tricks Max.  
Ace onside/any 3-3.

## KJ83 A54

Missing Q109762  
*Cash A . If no Q then cash K & lead to J8.*  
Win Q/Qx offside & any Q onside or 3-3.  
4 tricks only if 109762 - Q

## AJ10542

### 3

Missing KQ9876

Total possible cases:  $2^6=64$

3-3, 5-1, 6-0 not matter

Must manage 4-2

6 Tricks: Impossible

5 Tricks: Must have KQ doubleton

**4 Tricks: Must have Hx (or any 3-3)**

K987-Q6 Q987-K6 KQ98-76 KQ87-96

K986-Q7 Q986-K7 KQ97-86 KQ86-97

K976-Q8 Q976-K8 KQ96-87 KQ76-98

K876-Q9 Q876-K9

16 Cases

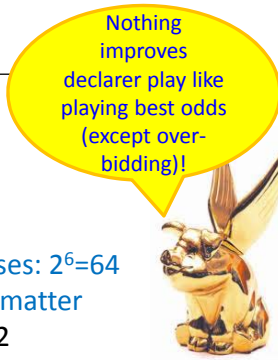
12 Cases

(Plus 2 cases: 9876-KQ)

Playing for Hx wins 18 cases/30

Playing for HHxx onside wins 6 cases/30

*Lead to A then play small*



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# Planning the Play

6

Goal: Make your contract

- **Stop** – **Look** – **Listen**
  - Bidding & opening lead - Honors & Distribution
  - Count Winners and Losers (Fast & Slow)
  - Count Entries & Control Cards (Stoppers in their suits)
  - Danger Hand & Avoidance
  - Discovery: Honors, Shape, # Tricks Needed in a suit
- List Trick Sources (ALL OF THEM)
- Sequence your play to keep all your chances alive
- Avoid unnecessary risks. Choose the more likely option
- Best play for the hand is more important than best play in any 1 suit. **(REPEAT THIS)**



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# Hand 1

♠ A7			
♥ 432			
♦ KQ1032			
♣ KJ8			
	N		
W			E
	S		
♠ K32			
♥ Q76			
♦ A7			
♣ A10953			

You declare 3N.  
 West leads ♥2 to East's ♥K.  
 Opponents take 4♥s then switch to ♠s.  
 Winners: 7 Losers: 6 (4♥s, 1♦, 1♣)



### Trick Sources:

- 1) ♦s split 3-3 (36%), ♦ J falls in 1 (2.4%) or 2 (16%)
- 2) ♦J onside and split 4-2 or 3-3 (42%)
- 3) ♣Q onside (50%)

If you choose only one play, the ♣ finesse is best.  
 But why not **combine chances** and improve your odds?

Cash top ♦s. If no ♦J falls then finesse the opponent with the most open spaces for the ♣Q.  
 Your likelihood of success is 54% + 50% (46%) = 77%

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 \text{Total} & & \text{Likelihood} & & \text{Likelihood} & & \text{Likelihood} \\
 \text{Likelihood} & & \text{Play 1 Wins} & & \text{Play 2 Wins} & & \text{Play 1 Loses} \\
 P_T & = & P_1 & + & P_2 & \times & (1 - P_1)
 \end{array}$$

Adding 36% to 50% = 86% overestimates your chances!!

# Hand 2

Eddie Kantar, Take All Your Chances Hand #19

♠ AJ654			
♥ AQ			
♦ 32			
♣ J832			
	N		
W			E
	S		
♠ K32			
♥ 8			
♦ A95			
♣ AKQ1095			

Contract: 6♣ Opening Lead: ♦Q  
 Winners: 10 Losers: 3

If either the ♠ Finesse or the ♥ finesse loses you are down.  
 Which one do you take first?

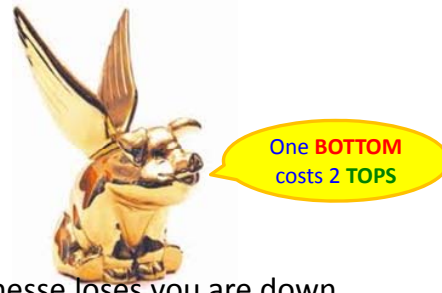
Trick Question: **Choosing between two finesses is WORSE than combining your chances.**

Cash ♠AK then take the ♥ finesse, planning to pitch your ♠ loser on the ♥A. Ruff out ♠s and pitch your ♦ loser.

27% + 50% (73%) = 63.5%

### EK's Combining Rule:

When missing the K in one suit and the Q in the other, cash the AK in the suit missing the Q an plan to finesse the K if the Q does not fall.



# Hand 3

♠ A85			
♥ 1094			
♦ A84			
♣ AQJ7			
	N		
W		E	
	S		
♠ KQJ			
♥ AQ765			
♦ 732			
♣ 62			

Contract 4♥ West Leads ♠4

Winners: 6 Losers: 5 (2♥, 2♦, 1♣)

Danger: ♦ Switch – 1 Control Card

Be pleasant. Let partner focus on their game and not your personality.



### Trick Sources:

♥ Finesse (J or K)?

♣ Finesse

Finessing the ♥J has 2 ways to lose: J or K

Finessing the ♥K loses only to the K.

To avoid ♦ switch before you test ♣s, finesse ♥Q. and play ♥A.

Test ♣s and pitch losing ♦ on ♣J if ♣Q loses to ♣K.

If you win the ♠ in hand and finesse ♣'s immediately, how will you feel if West ruffs a ♠ continuation?

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# Hand 4

♠ KQ84			
♥ KJ63			
♦ 863			
♣ A6			
	N		
W		E	
	S		
♠ 9532			
♥ A7			
♦ AQ4			
♣ KJ104			

Contract: 4♠ Opening Lead ♠10

East wins ♠A and switches to ♦9.

Winners: 6 Losers: 5-6

4 Finesses: ♠A, ♥Q, ♦K, ♣Q

### Plan:

Ruff 2♥s in hand, and try ruffing finesse in ♣s.

Finesses Taken: ♠A, ♦K

Finesses not taken: ♠J, ♥Q ← **PRACTICE FINESSES**

West covers ♣J on ruffing finesse attempt.

Low ♦ to ♦A allows ♦ Pitch on ♣10, making 5 for top board.



If opponents want to hear your side of the story they will invite you to dinner.

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# Hand 5

♠ K7
♥ AQ103
♦ AQ832
♣ KJ
N W     E S
♠ 4
♥ KJ642
♦ 87
♣ A10952



Contract 6♥. Opening Lead ♥5.  
 Trumps are 2-2.  
 Winners: 8 Losers: 3 (1 ♠, 1♦, 1♣)  
 3 Finesses in 3 suits. Odds all 3 work: 12.5%  
 Odds 2 of 3 work: 50%

- Trick Sources:
- 1) ♦K onside and ♦s 3-3 (18%) +2
  - 2) ♣Q onside and ♣s 3-3 (18%) +2
  - 3) ♣Q falls Q, Qx, Qxx (53%) +2
  - 4) ♣Q falls Qxxx (32%) +1
  - 5) ♦K onside and ♦s 4-2 (42%) +1
  - 6) ♠A onside (50%) +1

- Combine Chances:
- 1) ♠4 to ♠K. If wins, ruff out ♣s and ♦s (Drop ♦ on ♠)
  - 2) If Loses to LHO, pitch ♦8 on ♠K and ruff out minors.
  - 3) If loses RHO, take ♦ finesse and ruff out minors.

Finessing a minor first is weak strategy – if it loses, you are down. Finessing ♠s allows later ♦ finesse.

2 Finesses Work:  
 50% ♣Q Onside x  
 50% ♦K Onside  
 = 25%

♦Finesse + ♣Qxx:  
 53% ♣ Q (Qxx) x  
 50% ♦K Onside  
 = 27%

Likelihood CC:  
 50% ♠A Onside x  
 84% ♦s 4-2 x  
 84% ♣s 4-2 +  
 50% ♠K loses x  
 50% ♦K onside  
 = 60+%

“AND” chances multiply fractions & **REDUCE** chances. “OR” chances **ADD** to our odds.  
**Practice Finesses** add **RISK** and don't add to our odds. ♣ & ♦ finesses are PRACTICE If ♠ works.

# Hand 6

♠ K1053
♥ Q65
♦ 8
♣ AKQ96
N W     E S
♠ A9764
♥ A9732
♦ A65
♣ -

East	South	West	North
2♦ <sup>1</sup>	2♣	3♦	4♦ <sup>2</sup>
Pass	4♣	Pass	4N <sup>3</sup>
Pass	5♣ <sup>4</sup>	Pass	5♦ <sup>5</sup>
Pass	5♠ <sup>6</sup>	Pass	6♣

- All Pass**
- 1 = Weak 2 – 5-11 HCP
  - 2 = GF w/ Support or Slam Invite
  - 3 = Roman Keycard Blackwood
  - 4 = 0 or 3 Key Cards
  - 5 = Do you have ♠Q?     6 = No.



Contract 6♣. West Leads ♦2.  
 Winner: 7 Losers: 4 (1♠, 2♥, 1♣) Dummy Entries: 3 - ♠K & 2 ♦ ruffs.

- Trick Sources:
- 3♠, 1♥, 1♦ & 2♦ Ruffs, 4♣s & ♣ Ruff → Requires 4-4 ♣s
  - 2♠, 2♥, 1♦ & 2♦ Ruff, 3♣s & 2♣ Ruff → Needs ♥ end play.
  - ♠s 2-2 and ♥K on side. (0.4 x 0.5 or ~20% Chance).

Win ♦ A. Ruff ♦ then ruff ♣. Play ♠ A then ruff ♦. Then ♠ K assuming East follows once.

Run ♣s pitching ♥s. Hope who holds the high trump can't ruff the 4<sup>th</sup> ♣. If so all your ♥ losers disappear. If not, then hope South holds trump & ♥K and is endplayed.

# Hand 7



Save the  
postmortem  
for AFTER  
THE SESSION  
... save time  
for the next  
hand.

♠ K8			
♥ K8			
♦ K643			
♣ AQ542			
	N		
W			E
	S		
♠ A63			
♥ A6			
♦ AJ7			
♣ J9876			

Contract 6♣. West Leads ♠5.  
Winners: 7 Losers: 2

### Trick Sources:

- A) Eliminate Majors, Cash Top ♦s, and Finesse ♣s . (♦Qx)19% + ♣K 50% (64%) + 26%(16%) (Stiff ♣K and ♦xx East)= 55%.
- B) Cash ♣A then finesse ♦. 26% + 50%(100-26%) = 63%
- C) 1 of 2 Minor Suit finesses work. 50\*% + 48%(50%) = 74%
- D) Eliminate Major suits then play ♣A small ♣. 26% (Singleton ♣K) + 26% (Doubleton ♣K with South) + 50% ♦Q onside (100-52%) = **76%**

\*Missing ♣K103, Leading ♣J from South caters to 3-0 split onside.

See the Spring CBA Alert for more details on this hand.

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# Tips to Combine Chances

Eddie Kantar, Take All Your Chances

When you can afford to give up the lead, take the chance that adds to or keeps the rest of your chances.

When you can't afford to give up the lead:

Missing a Q (6 cards) and a J (7 cards) – cash the AK of the Q suit and finesse the J.

Missing 2 Q's , Cash the AK of the longer suit and finesse the Q of the shorter suit.

Missing a Q and a K, Cash the AK of the Q suit and finesse the K.

Missing 2 Kings – play the ace of the LONGER SUIT and finesse the shorter suit.

Be the  
partner you  
want to win  
with.



When bids say a defender holds a key card, play that s/he holds it, even if it goes against the odds.

Missing 6 cards, a 4-2 split happens 33% more often than a 3-3 split. Plan for 4-2.

Duck a trick to establish the suit only if you can afford to lose control.

Holding fragile side suits, strip the hand before playing the suit. Better still get opponents to play it.

Take the 1<sup>st</sup> finesse into the **NON DANGER** hand. **REPEAT**. Take the 1<sup>st</sup> finesse into the **NON DANGER** hand.

When you don't have time for 2 chances, take the one that is more likely to succeed.

Count who holds more cards in the suit and finesse that player for the Q.

Delay 2-way choices and fragile suits plays as late as possible.

Get rid of slow losers early, before they become fast losers.

With enough controls cards, give up sure losers early.

Take care of entries. This bears repeating. Take care of entries.

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## A Few Thoughts for Today...

- Odd suits split evenly, even suits splits oddly.
- Split Honors are 3x more likely than HHxx onside missing 6.
- Use entries wisely & **AVOID the Danger Hand**
- Take only the finesses you need. Combine chances. **AVOID practice finesses.**
- **Think:** Can I ruff out an Honor?
- Let opponents play for you...
- **Count** – Vacant Spaces or known count can point the way for better odds when finessing.
- Don't do complex analysis at the table. **ZZZZZZZZZZ**. Think in concepts and combine chances.



Partner deserves more than half the credit and none of the blame.

## Good Books

Eddie Kantar

Take All Your Chances  
Take All Your Chances II  
Take All Your Tricks

Eric Rodwell

The Rodwell Files: Secrets of a Bridge Champion

Hugh Kelsey

Bridge Odds for Practical Players

Michael Glauert

Jeff Rubens

Expert Bridge Simplified



If you don't like counting, there's always PlayStation

**Get Gold!**

*At the Flying Pig Regional  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

