



The Finesse Part I

WHAT is there to say about this particular topic that isn't banal and obvious? Quite a lot, in fact. To start with, can you actually define what a finesse actually is? No? Well, the dictionary definition isn't exactly a model of clarity – here it is in all its glory:

The finesse: The attempt to gain power for lower ranking cards by taking advantage of the favourable position of higher ranking cards held by the opposition.

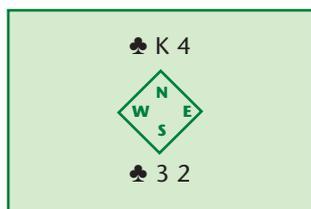
Hmmm. What that means is that there is a lot more to this than the everyday position that all textbooks use as the basis of all descriptions of the finesse:



This position is known to you all and requires only a brief description of the mechanism. The ♣A-Q holding is known as a 'tenace' (supposedly from the Spanish *tenaza*, meaning tongs or pincers) and it is axiomatic to lead up to a tenace and not away from it. Here, West is obliged to play before North (the tenace holder) after South leads the suit. Should West have the king of clubs he has no winning defence. Should East have the king of clubs, then the great dealer in the sky has smiled on

East-West and frowned on North-South. *C'est la vie.*

Anyway, the definition above means that the following layout also counts as a finesse:



Here the king of clubs will make a trick if West has the ace of clubs, always provided South takes the time and trouble to lead from his hand rather than from the North hand. True, there is no tenace position in this layout but, nonetheless, it still counts as a finesse.

So well are these positions known that players then abuse similar but crucially different layouts. For example, we have all seen this sort of butchery:



The only legitimate play for two tricks here is to hope that *West* has the king of

clubs. You can cash the ace of clubs and play up to the club queen, awaiting West's card. Some misguided players, though, deem it clever to lead and attempt to run the queen of clubs. It isn't. If West has the king of clubs, it's curtains. If East has it, he may well remember the adage 'Cover an honour with an honour' (a topic I intend to address in a later article, given indulgence by the editor) and he will place the king of clubs on the club queen, thus forcing the club ace and taking out two of the North-South high cards for one of the defenders. Against rational defence, leading the queen of clubs cannot gain.

Slightly more subtle is this layout:



How would you handle this suit for three tricks? It's time for a full deal.

Deal 1
South plays in 3NT.
West leads the ♠Q.

♠ A 5
♥ A K 6
♦ 8 7 5 2
♣ Q J 4 2

♠ K 3
♥ Q J 5
♦ A 9 6 3
♣ A 6 5 3

South plays in 3NT and West attacks in the suit where there is mutual shortage – spades. South can count two spades, three

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