

AVOID THAT FINESSE

This is a hand provided by Eddie Kantar, the great bridge writer:

North
 ♠A7532
 ♥A104
 ♦K6
 ♣J98

South
 ♠Q9
 ♥KJ875
 ♦AQJ852
 ♣-----

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♠ (1)	2♣	2♦ (2)
Pass	2♠ (3)	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♦ (4)	Pass	4♥
Pass	5♥ (5)	Pass	6♥ (6)
All Pass			

- (1) North is the dealer in the hand above and opens 1♠. He has 12 HCP but his 5-card spade suit technically qualifies him for an opening bid.
- (2) You are South and have a decidedly unbalanced hand. In fact, there is an expression that describes the hand: “six five come alive!” That means with 11 cards in two suits you want to bid aggressively. Ignoring East’s overcall, you start bidding your hand, starting with the longest suit - 2♦. You plan to show your pattern by bidding the shorter suit twice. Because the longer suit is lower ranking, you will be making a reverse bid, promising extra points but that is what your 6-5 hand allows you to do.
- (3) North has no choice but to rebid his 5-card suit. This bid shows a 6-card holding so it is a lie. However, it is the least harmful lie of his options. 2♥ promises four hearts and 2NT promises a club stopper.
- (4) You are undeterred and show your 5-card heart suit, and North supports your diamonds rather than your hearts. This is correct. If he supports your second suit he promises four hearts with a likely 6-card spade suit. He gives preference for your longest suit with his 4♦ bid.
- (5) You complete your 6-5 pattern by rebidding your hearts and partner now shows his heart support at the five level. He is emboldened by his holding of 3 honors in his partners 11 red suited cards.

(6) You certainly have come alive. Your void is a further asset. You could have been 1-1 in the black suits. You bid the slam you hope you can make!

You are proud of yourself for bidding this slam on a technical basis. The only problem is you have to play and make it! West leads the ♣ 2 and it's time to plan the play.

You have 1 spade loser and a probable heart loser. You have several finesses available. You can finesse the ♠Q if East holds the ♠K. You can also finesse against the outstanding ♥ Q either way. Or, the ♥ Q might fall under the ♥AK. Multiple guesses. Your only hint from the bidding is from the 2 ♣ overcall by East. That might indicate he holds the ♠K. On the other hand, holding length in clubs might indicate his partner has longer spades and is more likely to hold the honor. None of these clues really help.

I've said before, if you can avoid a %50 finesse, try to do it. Is there another way to take 12 tricks that doesn't rely on any finesse?

Notice the solid diamond suit. You have six winners in your hand and only 2 diamonds in the dummy. That will allow you to discard 4 cards on the good diamonds and those 4 cards are the low spades in the dummy. Now you can trump the losing spade in the dummy's hand.

The way to play this is to win the first club lead in your hand with a ruff, and play the ♥AK. If the ♥Q drops your problems are over. If not, let the defenders take the ♥Q anytime they want. You are going to play off your 6 diamonds and discard the dummy's small spades. If the defenders lead a spade when they claim their good trump, don't try to finesse, but go up with the ♠A. Get back to your hand with a club ruff and finish the diamonds. Now you can trump your ♠Q in the dummy and claim.

This is the complete board:

Bridge Base Online		W N E S			
D	1	1♠	2♣	2♦	
N North	♠ A7532	P	2♣	P	3♥
	♥ A104	P	4♦	P	4♥
	♦ K6	P	5♥	P	6♥
	♣ J98				
W West	♠ KJ86				
	♥ Q32				
	♦ 104				
	♣ 10732				
E East	♠ 104				
	♥ 96				
	♦ 973				
	♣ AKQ654				
S South	♠ Q9				
	♥ KJ875				
	♦ AQJ852				
	♣				
		6♥ S	NS: 0	EW: 0	

Notice there were only 23 HCP between the two hands. Your slam was the result of a very shapely hand and good declarer play.

By the way, if you were sitting East and your partner leads the low club, you should win that trick with the ♣A, not the ♣Q. If it is trumped by the declarer your partner knows you hold the ♣AKQ. If it holds the trick, follow up with the ♣Q, not the ♣K. If declarer ruffs, partner will know you started with the ♣AKQ. By playing the ♣A first, you do not give away the strength of your suit. If you had played the ♣Q on the first trick, you make it easier for the declarer to place the other missing honor cards.

If you would like to see the whole hand played out, click on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/lwyggj3>. Or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick.