

Micro Bridge Lesson 36

Eight Ever, Nine Never

Dummy ♠AJ97
 Declarer ♠KT865

The bridge maxim "Eight Ever, Nine Never" was designed to make easier the decision whether to finesse for the SQ or play SA then SK. The theory is with 4 trumps missing, the queen will come down *most* of the time. So, with *nine* trumps, *never* finesse. This is called *playing for the drop*. The contrary is true with 8 trumps between you and dummy. Now, they are likely to break 3-2 with the queen with the longer holding. Therefore, you should finesse giving you a 50% chance.

With nine trumps, the reasoning is flawed. The queen is coming down 54% of the time. That isn't much better than the finesse!

Instead, you need to look at the *whole* hand. There are frequently clues as to the approach you should take:-

- Did one opponent make a pre-emptive bid? If so, that takes care of more of his 13 cards making a spade shortage more likely.
- Did an opponent double your contract? Play him for the queen. Silly double, wasn't it?
- Is this a slam and did your LHO bang down an ace at trick one with little indication that it would be a good idea? If so, this person might fancy their chances of having a trump winner also from Qxx
- In No trumps, can you play on other suits first to get an idea of the distribution?
- The flinch test. Quickly play ST look out for a pause from LHO. Of course, if you act on the opponent's flinches, it is at your own risk! Somewhat bizarrely, some opponents will actually cover your ten.
- Avoidance play. If you cannot stand to have your RHO on lead, play ST to the SA and then run the SJ. OK, when the spades are 2-2, you have conceded a trick. How important is this? At teams, it is fine so long as your contract is safe. This *safety play* is highly recommended. At pairs, it is not so easy. The overtrick which you concede when the spades are 2-2 will cost. There are other issues to consider:-
 ...Is this an unbelievably good contract?
 ...Is this a slam?
 ...Will an average result from this board be sufficient?
 ...Would a different opening lead have scuttled the contract?

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes", then the safety play is warranted.

• Being "*with the field*". At pairs, there are lots of boards where you expect most of the field will be in the same contract and you expect the "standard line" will be taken by most declarers. To do something different will probably result in a different number of tricks. Top pairs players wait for the good results to come to them – they don't chase them on every board!

Dummy ♣AJT986
 Declarer ♣K75

Here you are declarer in 3NT. There are no outside entries in dummy. How should you play the suit? Ask your self a few questions:-

- How many tricks do I need from this suit? If you need *six*, you had better play for the drop. If you need only *five* and you don't mind losing to RHO, then you should play SK then small to SJ.
- Notice if you play for the drop and it fails, you get *two* tricks.
- At pairs, if the opening lead seems odd and has donated a trick to you, you should finesse. Don't be greedy unless you need to shoot for tops because of earlier bad scores.

Tip: On the CK did you drop the C8 from dummy? If LHO has all *four* clubs, you will then be able to run your C7 from hand, saving a valuable entry

Dummy ♣AKT7432
 Declarer ♣86

With no other entries, how should you play this suit? Again, your reasoning should be as before. How many tricks etc

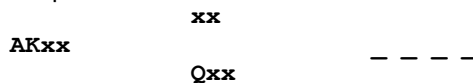
When I played this hand in 3NT, I led the 8 and LHO popped up with Queen. *Good news, eh?*
 Not quite. Ask yourself, "*Why did he play the queen?*"
 Answer : "*Because it was the only one he had!*"
 That means your RHO has J95. If you don't duck that queen, you will lose the *third* trick in the suit and that will be curtains. Of course, LHO may be playing the queen from QJ doubleton. In that case, he's too clever for me.

Defending with Qxx

The answer to this is PLAN.

When you're looking at Qxx, you can be sure that declarer will be looking for your queen.

- Don't fall for the flinch test!
- Check out dummy and decide your plan. As surely as night follows day, this suit is going to be played. ...If it is trumps, make sure that you have your plan immediately dummy hits the table.
 ...Does he have nine trumps? If so, he's probably going to play for the drop unless you – or partner with a singleton – give him other ideas. Remember, it is very bad ethics to pause with a singleton. However, you don't have to play it at the speed of light either.
 ...If dummy is on your left with AKx(x) of trumps, it looks like your queen is dead. Not necessarily. Declarer's trumps might be so bad that the finesse is not possible.



FAQ: So, do I cover the jack from declarer or not?
ANS: Well, if you think about it when the jack hits the table, it's too late!. The bridge maxim, "*Always cover an honour with an honour*" is untrue. It should be "*Cover an honour with an honour if it could promote a card in either your own or partner's hand.*"

If declarer has J432, he shouldn't be leading the jack. He should be playing AK and hoping for a doubleton queen to drop. So, he probably has the ten. If it must be a 4-4 fit from the bidding, you should duck smoothly. Let him fish for it!