

The Play of the cards – Tips for the improver

This is the first of three articles looking at the much used, and sometimes abused, **finesse**. The following suit illustrates the simplest position:

A765
QJ109

Leading the queen gives four tricks providing the king is with your left hand opponent. However, supposing your honours are divided between the hands. Now the route to the optimum number of tricks is less straightforward and is dependent on the ability to take repeated finesses, eg

(1)	AQJ94	(2)	AJ104
	1072		Q95

In (1) you lead the ten to be in a position to lead again if it succeeds. In (2) the lead of the nine allows the queen then to be led on the second round. In these first examples the overall strength of your holdings has allowed you to lead a high card, but the general rule is to **lead low to a finesse**. Take these two positions:

(1)	AQJ5	(2)	AJ1074
	1072		Q62

In (1) if you lead the ten in order to be in a position to lead again if it succeeds, it will cost a trick whenever West holds a singleton or doubleton king. In (2) the lead of the queen will cost when West holds a singleton king, because East's 9xxx will command the fourth round. Of course, if you are short of entries you may still lead the high card but then you are reliant on a favourable distribution. To lead a high card would be even worse in these very common situations:

(1)	AQ742	(2)	AJ10742
	J63		Q6

If West holds Kx you can develop five tricks from the first combination by finessing the queen and laying down the ace. If you lead the jack first, you must lose at least one trick however the cards lie, for if West holds the king he will play it on the queen. The same principle applies in (2). In the conditions of actual play, it may be convenient to lead the queen, but this costs a trick when West holds a singleton king. With a combination of honours, the aim is to finesse the lowest first:

(1)	KJ6	(2)	KJ10
	52		86

In (1) the only way to win two tricks is by finessing the jack on the first round, hoping that West holds both ace and queen. In (2) the important card is the queen, not the ace. You begin by finessing the ten and win two tricks whenever West holds the queen. Of course, in the play of an individual hand you might only need one trick from (2) and, if you place the ace with West, you would rise with the king on the first round.