

### **ALEX'S BRIDGE TIP # 1**

Do not lead a singleton against a small slam in a suit contract if you also have a side Ace in your hand. The opponents did not get to 6 missing two aces so partner cannot have the Ace in your singleton and cannot give you a ruff. AND by leading that singleton, you may be now showing declarer where all the missing honours are in that suit.

BUT do lead a singleton vs a small slam if you do not have an Ace, in hopes that partner has that Ace and can give you a ruff.

### **ALEX'S BRIDGE TIP # 2**

If partner does not lead your suit, you can assume that partner

- a) may be void in your suit
- b) may be leading a singleton
- c) may be leading top of a sequence
- d) has forgotten the bidding!

## CARD PLAY 101

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Occasionally you will be faced with a decision. Do you finesse or play for the drop?

Example:

Dummy

S AK2

Declarer

S Q1043

You need four spade tricks. You cash the SA; both opponents follow with low cards. You take the SK; again, two low spades appear. You lead the S2, and East contributes the last low spade.

Do you put up the SQ, hoping to drop the SJ, or do you finesse the S10?

Rather than carry all of these "positions" (*as they are called*) around in your head, there is a scheme to help you. It was devised a few decades ago by David Parry, a friend of mine from London.

You divide by two the number of cards held by the opponents, and if you get a half, round up. That is their number.

Then you count up your top tricks in the suit. If your number is less than their number, then you finesse. If your number is not less, do not finesse. (I know it should be fewer, not less, but that doesn't rhyme.)

In this example (above), they have six spades; so their number is three. Since you have three top tricks, your number is not less, so do not finesse – put up your SQ.

Now let's try some others. How would you play each of these combinations for the maximum number of tricks available?

A)

Dummy

H 3

Declarer

H A K Q J 9

B)

Dummy

H K Q 10 3

Declarer

H A 7

C)

Dummy

H K J 7 3

Declarer

H A 4 2

D)

Dummy

H K J 5 3

Declarer

H A 7 6 4

In A, they (opponents) have seven hearts, so their number is four: seven divided by two is 3.5, which you round up to four. You have four top tricks. Since your number is not less, do not finesse; play out your top honors, expecting the 10 to drop.

In B, their number is four: 3.5 rounded up. But your number is only three.

So, cash the HA, then play low to dummy's H10.

In C, their number is three (six divided by two). Your number is only two. Cash the HA, then play low to dummy's jack. If the finesse wins, cash the HK and hope for a 3–3 break.

Combination D is the same. You cash the HA, then play low to dummy's HJ. This is the well-known “eight ever.”

E)

Dummy

H K J 5 3

Declarer

H A 8 7 6 4

In contrast, E is “nine never.” Cash the HA, then play low to the HK. However, remember that the odds are close; do not be shy of finessing on the second round, especially if you know that East has more cards in another suit than West. (*i.e. if the bidding has given you specific clues*).

F)

Dummy

H A J 10 3 2

Declarer

H Q 9 7 6 4

G)

Dummy

H A J 10 3 2

Declarer

H Q 9 7 6 5 4

H)

Dummy

H A J 10 8 3 2

Declarer

H Q 9 7 6 5 4

In F, their number is two and yours is one. Take the finesse. A priori, West will have the king 50% of the time, but East will have the singleton king only 13% of the time. The finesse is almost four times a better play than trying to drop the king offside.

In G, though, the rule tells you to play for the drop. However, start by leading the HQ. Maybe West, holding both missing hearts, will make the bad error— for his side, but not for you – of covering with his HK. Or he will sit and think about it for a while, giving the game away.

H. I imagine you thought the last one (H) was a typo. Not so! I once watched a player in London with this holding. He led his HQ and West showed out. Declarer threw his arms in the air and said, “I am always unlucky.” He played low from the dummy and lost to the singleton king! He thought that he had only 11 cards in the suit.

Finally, here is a declarer-play problem:

S 4  
H KQJ  
D 87543  
C A652

S 7632  
H 843  
D K9  
C **K**QJ10

S J985  
H 7652  
D QJ10  
C 93

S AKQ10  
H A109  
D A63  
C 874

S     N  
1N   3N

Yes, the bidding might have taken a different route. You can make 5 D in the same way as 3NT.

In our favorite game contract, you have five tricks outside of spades: one club, one diamond and three hearts. So, you must take four spade tricks.

You are missing eight spades, so their magic number is four (eight divided by two). Since you have only three top spade tricks, finesse. After winning with dummy's C A, play a spade to your A K Q 10 and finesse.

Remember, bridge isn't a game for cowards.

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