

EIGHT EVER, NINE NEVER—or NOT?

by Maritha

We learn the jingle of “Eight ever, nine never,” in regard to finessing for a queen. The general rule is that you finesse for the queen when you hold 8 cards in the suit and you do not finesse (but play for the drop) with nine cards in the suit. As always, there are exceptions.

Finesse when One Opponent has Preempted or Shown Length in a Side Suit.

If one opponent has shown a six or seven-card suit and only 4 cards are outstanding in your trump suit, it is much more likely that your trump suit will divide 3-1 rather than 2-2. In that case, the person who does NOT have a long suit is more likely to have three of your trumps. So, you should finesse that opponent for the queen.

Play for the Drop to Keep the Dangerous Hand Off the Lead.

If you have a suit with AKJ10x opposite xxx, you would normally finesse. If, however, the opponent playing after the AKJ10x is the dangerous opponent, you cannot afford to finesse. Cash the AK. If the doubleton queen falls from either side, you are fine. If the opponent in front of the AKJ10x has the queen, you have lost an extra trick, but protected yourself from the dangerous hand.

Finesse to Keep the Dangerous Hand from Getting the Lead.

Similarly, when you have nine cards and would normally play for the drop, you finesse THROUGH the dangerous hand (dangerous hand playing second) to avoid the possibility of ever losing a trick to the dangerous hand. You are willing to let the safe hand win a singleton or doubleton queen to avoid letting the dangerous hand ever get in.

When you are combining chances in several suits and cannot afford to lose the lead, you normally play for the drop in the suit(s) in which you have the most cards and then finesse in your final suit. So, if you need only one more trick and have AKJx opposite xxxx in one suit; and Axx opposite KJx in another suit; you cash the AK in the suit in which you have 8 cards (hoping the queen will drop). If the queen does not appear, then you cash the Ace and finesse in the second suit.