

TIMING AT THE BRIDGE TABLE

By Maritha

Often, in order to make your contract, you have to do certain plays BEFORE other plays. It is a good idea to plan out the sequence of your plays before you play to the first trick. Timing issues will also affect which finesses you take when. Sometimes, transportation issues (getting back and forth between Declarer's hand and dummy) will affect your decisions around timing. In no trump, which suit you develop often depends on how many times you can afford to give up the lead. If it is safe to give up the lead, establish your slow tricks in suits in which you have **inevitable** losers (e.g., QJxx opposite 109xx). If the opponents have too many quick tricks to cash, try a finesse rather than knocking out an Ace.

Examples:

10x KQJ10 AJ109 Kxx opposite AJx xx Kxx AJ10xx. Lead is a low spade to your Jack. Must knock out Ace of hearts (SURE entry for opponents) first. Then, hold up Ace of spade until 3rd round. Take club finesse so that RHO will get in IF the club finesses loses. Hopefully, even if finesse loses, RHO will have no more spades. [If you had needed the diamond finesse, you would also take it so that RHO would win (if any opponent.)]

AQJ32 Kx xx AKQJ opposite 1098 AQJ10 Axx xxx & the contract is 6S, with the lead of the King of diamonds. You hope that the King of spades is onside, but you DARE NOT play spades right away. First, you must take the Ace of diamonds, play to King of hearts on dummy and then Ace and Queen of hearts in your hand, pitching the losing diamond from dummy. Then, and only then, will you take the spade finesse. This way, you ensure 6 even if the King of spades is offside (7 if it is onside). If you play spades first, the opponents could get 1 spade trick and 1 diamond trick for down 1.

You hold AQJxx Axx xx KJx opposite 1098 xxx AQJ10 AQx in a contract of 4S, with the lead of the King of hearts. That lead has attacked your weakest holding, so you could (conceivably) lose 2 heart tricks, one diamond trick (if the finesse loses) and 1 spade trick (if the finesse loses). However, if the diamond finesse works, you can pitch one losing heart on a good diamond. (If you try to pitch 2 losing hearts, someone will trump the 4th diamond. With 6 diamonds between you and dummy, the other 7 diamonds rate to break 4-3 in the opponents' hands.) Take Ace of hearts and immediately finesse diamonds. If it works, return to King of clubs and finesse diamonds again. Then, cash Ace of diamonds, pitching a heart. Only AFTER you have done that, can you afford to try the spade finesse.

A432 AQ10 AKQ AK4 opposite QJ10 67 8742 QJ56 and the contract is 6NT with the lead of the Jack of diamonds. You would like to finesse once or twice in hearts and once in spades, but you have only ONE entry to dummy: the queen (or jack) of clubs. (You also have chances for extra tricks if spades break 3-3 or if diamonds break 3-3.) Proper timing is to try the SPADE finesse first. If it loses, you can then return to dummy with the Jack and then the 10 of spades. Proper timing is to play AK of clubs and club to queen. If clubs break reasonably, cash Jack as well and pitch 10 of hearts. Now play spade finesse. If it works, cover King with Ace of spades and cash the other two top diamonds. If diamonds break 3-3, return to dummy with the Jack (or 10) of spades and cash the 13th diamond, throwing away queen of hearts. If diamonds do NOT break 3-3, return to dummy with the spade, cash the other spade (hope that spades are 3-3) and try the heart finesse. You expect to get 4 club tricks, 3 or 4 diamonds, 1 or 2 hearts, 3 or 4 spades, depending on breaks and finesses.

AKQ2 456 AQ KQ45 opposite 789 AKQ2 45 AJ67 & the contract is 6NT with the lead of the 10 of clubs. You only have 11 top tricks, but have 3 chances for a 12th: if spades are 3-3; if hearts are 3-3; if king of diamonds is onside. Proper technique is to cash top 3 hearts and top 3 spades (in either order). If either one breaks 3-3, you are fine. If one breaks 3-3, you can still try the diamond finesse at the end IF the hand into

which you are finessing does NOT have the 4th card in hearts or spades. If both spades & hearts break 3-3, you have 13 tricks. If neither breaks 3-3, you have to try the diamond finesse (and hope that person does not have a 4th heart or spade to cash as well). Or you may be able to end play left-hand opponent (throwing LHO in with a heart or a spade) to give you a “free finesse” in diamonds.