

## September 2019 ACBL Bulletin Notes

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Page 44, **Alder** – *Take the 100% finesse, not the 50% finesse*

Your contract is 4S. You have nine sure tricks: seven spades and the two minor suit aces. You need to find one more trick.

Looking at your AQ of diamonds, the diamond finesse gives you a 50% chance to score a tenth trick. But you're much too good to take a 50% (which loses, in this case) chance when there is most likely a 100% chance available.

West has led the CK, which gives you information about his hand. Playing standard/normal leads, the lead of the CK promises the CQ. So now you know your tenth trick will be a second trick. But you will have to play carefully in order to get it.

First, pause and think before playing to trick one. This is always good advice, and in this case it's critical. This is a theme we'll come back to in Boehm's column.

You have two decisions to make:

1. Whether to win the first trick or duck it
2. What card to play from your hand

Holding A T 2, if you win the CA, that will be the only club trick you will get. West will win his CQ the next time clubs are played. Yeah, your CT is now good, but you have no entry to it and the opponents are unlikely to help. You would get only one club trick, not two. So you duck, playing the 2.

Now to the second decision. Holding J 5, your first thought might be to pitch the 5 from your hand. Your plan might be to lead the CJ, have West cover with the CQ, you win your CA and then get your second trick with the CT. Opponents, however, do not always follow your plan. If LHO ducks the CJ, the CJ will win, but you will have stranded the good CA in dummy and again will be held to only one club trick.

So the key play at trick one is to let the CK win, play the C2 from dummy and unblock the CJ from your hand.

You never have to take the 50% diamond finesse. Win in your hand as soon as you are able. Pull trump, and lead the C5 of clubs toward the A T, taking the marked finesse against West's CQ. Whether or not West goes up with the CQ, you will be on the board to take the second club trick.

Page 46, **Todd** – “Body cards”

Todd’s key point is this: *Most players are too focused on the top of their suit when trying to determine if they hold a good suit for preempting.*

He notes that it can be disastrous to preempt with A K 5 4 3 2 if you don’t have a fit with partner. You will take only the A K and will lose two or three tricks in the suit if partner can’t help.

However, Q J T 9 8 7 will lose exactly two tricks if partner has neither the ace nor the king.

In both cases, let’s assume a 7 HCP preempt. The hand with A K 5 4 3 2 is likely to take fewer tricks than the Q J T 9 8 7, as the latter hand has only 3 HCP in the long suit, and a likely trick elsewhere.

Intermediate cards are important when evaluating a hand – even though they don’t add to your high card count (although for our own purposes, we add a half point and sometimes a full point for a useful T).

Page 54, **Boehm** – *Trick one*

Boehm’s column discusses planning before playing to the first trick.

In the first example, we are declaring 4S and West leads the HQ. We have a potential loser in each suit – one too many. This hand demonstrates two of our favorite themes:

1. Plan at trick one
2. Take all your chances

The key to this hand is to win in declarer’s hand and lead a low club toward the Q at trick two. This will secure the contract if West has the CK. Assuming West rises with the CK, our CQ is now good. Once we get in, we’d win the CQ, cross to the DA, and then discard the slow heart loser in dummy on the CA.

If the CK is offside, behind the CQ, then we would fall back on the spade finesse to make the contract.

If we had taken the spade finesse first and it lost, the defense would knock out our second heart honor. When the defense gets in with the CK, they would take a heart as the setting trick, as we would not yet have had the opportunity to discard dummy’s third heart.

We need to test the clubs first to take all our chances at getting rid of one of our potential losers. Timing (also referred to as “tempo”) is important.

In the second example, we are declaring 3N and West leads the H3.

We count six sure tricks—four aces and two kings—and can pick up at least three more tricks in the spade suit, provided we can get to them.

The key is not to play a heart honor from dummy at trick one. If we leave the QJ in dummy, one of them will be an entry to the spades. Accordingly, we win (and unblock) the HA. We cash the SA, and lead the S3 towards dummy.

If it's our lucky day, we will pick up the entire spade suit. If not, we will still make our contract after losing the SQ: four spades, two hearts, one diamond and two clubs. Nine tricks.