

Thinking bridge - NABC-Summer 2010 - New Orleans-L A.

By Eddie Kantar (No 2 article)

How you play certain card combinations depends on certain variables. The first three were listed in yesterday's Daily Bulletin on this page.

Here are the rest. Tomorrow we will see some examples.

4. The bidding

The bidding frequently affects the play of a particular suit.

North

♠K J 3 2

West East

? ?

South

♠A 6 5 4

The normal play for four tricks with this holding is to lead the ace and low to the jack needing to find West with Q-x(x). However, if the bidding has told you that East must have the queen, play the ace and low to the king, hoping East has Q-x.

North

♠A Q J

West East

♠5 ?

South

♠4 3 2

Say you are playing a heart contract with no adverse bidding and West leads a low spade, an unbid suit. You would need a very good reason not to take the finesse. However, if East has opened 2♠, weak, presumably showing six spades, you can read the lead as a singleton and unless you enjoy seeing your good tricks ruffed away, play the ace. What about at notrump, where there is no danger of a ruff? Nine times out of 10, finesse. When wouldn't you? In fact, there are several scenarios where you would be putting your contract at risk by taking the finesse when taking the ace is a 100% play to make the contract:

1. You have enough tricks to make your contract, but are wide open in another suit.
2. You can't afford to let them in before you set up another suit for fear of a disastrous shift.

5. The count

Having the count on a suit is a huge plus before attacking a suit. It frequently alters the percentage play in the suit. Here is an example:

North

♠Q 10 5 4

West East

? ?

South

♠A K 6

The percentage play for four spade tricks is to play the ace and king and low to the queen. However, if the count tells you that West started with four spades, play the ace-king and low to the 10. If the count tells you that East has four spades, pray that West has J-x!

6. Avoidance plays: keeping the danger hand off lead.

North

♠A 10 8 6

West East

? ?

South

♠K J 7 4 2

It might be worth a possible trick (even several) to make sure a particular opponent – the “danger hand” – does not get the lead. Perhaps you have K-x in a suit

The trick to keeping the danger hand from getting in is to make sure that hand plays second to the finesse trick, not last. If West is the danger hand, play the king and low to the 10 finessing into East. If East is the danger hand, play the ace and low to the jack, finessing into West. In both cases the danger hand plays second to the trick, the non-danger hand, last.

In summary: Whether you are declarer or third hand, before playing to a trick, particularly the first trick, consider the deal as a unit, not just the suit that has been led (a common error partner often makes). Do the same later in the play before attacking a suit. One of those &^%\$ variables might apply! Look ahead. Amen.