



January 2006 BridgeHands Newsletter

Promotions are easy to love

January 2006

Dear Friend,

Last month we featured the finesse, widely enjoyed by bridge players. Unfortunately, finesses do not always work, nor do we always have an opportunity to finesse. To further complicate the matter, in many situations attempting the finesse is not the best strategy. This month we will take a look at one such tactic, the promotion of a long suit.

Our second topic mixes the Laws and Jargon: Coffeehousing - beware of the "dark side" and learn how ethical Law 73 protects us.

The "Rule of 15" has nothing to do with the Laws yet helps us effectively compete when we anticipate a competitive auction

Note: Viewing the hands below requires your EMAIL reader to use "fixed fonts" (not proportional). If you have problems reading this document, please view our [copy at the BridgeHands website](#).



Everyone loves a Promotion

This month we will take a look at how promotion of a long suit can help us pickup extra tricks.

But first, let's review the odds of how cards tend to divide between the opponents in our long suit. The general rule is: an even number of combined cards held by the opponents will usually break unevenly, while an odd number of cards usually tend to break evenly for the opponents.

Number of Missing Cards	Likely Distribution
3 (odd number)	2-1
4 (even number)	3-1
5 (odd number)	3-2
6 (even number)	4-2
7 (odd number)	4-3

Secondly, let's give entry management a quick review. Assuming you cannot get to the dummy hand (North) in another suit, how do you play these suits?

A K 8 7 2

9 4 3

We expect a 3-2 split and have a third entry to dummy that will allow us to win 4 tricks most of the time. However, we must be sure to unblock our entry to the dummy by playing the 9 on trick one or two. Otherwise if you first win the Ace and King, the 9 must win the third trick, leaving no entry to the dummy.

A K 9 8 7 6

3 2

We also anticipate a 3-2 break with our 8 card suit. To win 5 tricks, we duck the first trick playing a low dummy card from the dummy, then winning the second and third trick to capture the opponents' remaining cards.

K 8 7 2

A 5 4

Here we expect a 4-2 split so most of time we will only win two tricks. But if we have no better strategy, we can hope for a 3-3 split (36 percent chance) of opponents' cards. If we get the lucky suit break, we can take 3 tricks. We employ a play similar to the prior hand, ducking the first trick, then playing the Ace and King, hoping to be rewarded winning 3 tricks with the 13th card in the dummy when opponents each hold 3 cards in the suit.

As declarer with five or more trump, a common strategy is to first draw trump and develop extra tricks by cashing our small trump winners. Depending on the lay of the cards, this tactic is often appropriate in long side suits. Promoting a long suit is also a primary tactic when playing a Notrump contract. In fact, promotions are not the exclusive property of the declarer. Particularly in Notrump contracts when an opponent leads their fourth best card or the top of an honor sequence, the defenders are attempting to "win the race" by promoting their suit before declarer gets a chance to establish a suit of their own. As a defender, your partner will also appreciate your thoughtful lead of a card from partner's bid suit.

As a warm-up, let's try two similar hands, both playing a 3 Notrump contract by South:

```

S   K 4
H   A 10 4
D   A K 10 8 7 4
C   10 5
  
```

```

SQ
+----+
|      |
|      |
+----+
  
```

```

S   A 5
H   Q 9 5
D   6 2
C   A 9 7 6 4 2
  
```

West leads the Spade Queen, South playing 3 Notrump. Looking at our quick tricks, we have 2 Spades, 1 Heart, 2 Diamonds, and 1 Club - 6 tricks from 9 so we need to find 3 more. Promoting the Diamond suit is our best bet. We win the Spade Ace, just in case we might need an extra entry to the dummy since we're promoting the Diamond suit. Opponents will usually hold 3-2 with five outstanding cards, so we play up to our Diamond Ace followed by our Diamond King happy to see opponents both follow with four of their five cards. So we're home free after conceding the last Diamond to make our contract. Here's a hand that looks similar, but the lack of dummy entries requires careful planning.

```

S   6 4
H   Q 10 4
D   A K 10 8 7 4
C   10 5
  
```

```

SQ
+----+
|      |
|      |
+----+
  
```

```

S   A K
H   A 9 5
D   6 2
C   A 9 7 6 4 2
  
```

West leads the Spade Queen, South playing 3 Notrump. We've moved the Spade King to South, with our same 6 quick tricks. Again the Diamond suit promotion is our plan, but this time we don't have the precious Spade entry. Do you recall our earlier review where we "ducked" (played low) to a six card suit headed by the Ace and King to setup a long suit? Good - so let's do the same thing here. We win the Spade King. Again, we hope opponents are 3-2 in Diamonds, but this time playing a **low** Diamond - ducking with a low card in the dummy. The opponents win the trick and will certainly continue the Spade suit, looking to

promote their own suit - the race is on! We win the trick with our remaining Spade King stopper, and now play our Diamond Ace. We are delighted to see opponents both playing two more Diamonds, leaving one. We can now play the dummy Diamond King, and again have won four Diamond tricks to make our contract using a long suit promotion - one step ahead of the opponents Spade effort. If we initially played our two top Diamonds in the dummy, the opponents would win the third trick, leaving us no dummy entries - ducking the first round was the only winning play - well done.

Now let's try a 3 Notrump contract for South, looking at all four hands:

S	K	Q							
H	8	6	5	4					
D	7	6							
C	K	10	9	8	3				

S	J	10	9	8	7	6	+-----+	S	5	4		
H	K	9	7					H	10	3	2	
D	A	K						D	5	4	3	2
C	Q	J					+-----+	C	7	6	5	4

S	A	3	2						
H	A	Q	J						
D	Q	J	10	9	8				
C	A	2							

West opens with 1 Spade and South ends up playing a 3 Notrump contract. West leads the Spade Jack, optimistic about promoting the long Spade suit with two Diamond entries. North wins the Spade Queen. Should South take the Heart finesse or promote Diamonds? We can see the finesse fails, West persisting with a second Spade to North's Spade King. Unfortunately for South, it's one trick too late to promote Diamonds – West wins one Heart, two Diamonds and three Spades, so South goes down two. A better tactic for South on the second trick is to win the promotion race by immediately tackling Diamonds. The slugfest goes like this, win a Spade, lose a Diamond, win a Spade, lose the last Diamond, and win the last Spade. Congratulations, you've won the race losing two Diamonds and one Heart making 3 Notrump with an overtrick.

Be aware the promotion play is only one of many tactics. Always consider your contract objective and alternatives as well as [Environmental Factors](#). Let's take a seemingly unimportant Spade 2 away from South to illustrate how it can influence the declarer's tactics.

S	K	Q						S	5	4	<u>2</u>	
H	8	6	5	4				H	3	2		
D	7	6						D	5	4	3	2
C	K	10	9	8	3			C	7	6	5	4

S	J	10	9	8	7	6	+-----+	S	5	4	<u>2</u>	
H	K	9	7					H	3	2		
D	A	K						D	5	4	3	2
C	Q	J					+-----+	C	7	6	5	4

S	A	3										
H	A	Q	J	<u>10</u>								
D	Q	J	10	9	8							
C	A	2										

Giving up the Spade 2 and receiving the Heart 10 seems like a great exchange. But now when West leads the Spade Jack, we can see there's no way to win the race! Win a Spade, lose a Diamond, win the last Spade lose a Diamond, but now West is home free winning two Diamonds and four Spades. What went wrong? South only has two stoppers and West is one trick ahead of the promotion race. How about the repeated Heart finesse? Sorry, even if it worked, we only have eight tricks. Also, considering we have 28 points and West opened, it's hard to imagine East holding a King; 40 points in the deck minus our 28, and West probably opened with 12 points so East must be bust. Instead, how about a Club finesse combined with a suit promotion? Based on our math calculation ($40-28=12$), West likely has at least one Club honor. So South begins with the Club Ace, the high card from the short side and feels some relief when an honor appears from West. Continuing with a second Club, declarer is overjoyed to see the last honor appear, making five Clubs (pitching two Diamonds is fine), three Hearts and two Spades.

Did you notice how giving up the tiny Spade led us to changing our promotion strategy from Diamonds to Clubs? Bridge is interesting that way, illustrating how such a little card can make a big difference. Incidentally, if West didn't open and we thought East might hold the Heart King, a repeated Heart finesse might be in order. For our final rendition, let's give poor East the Heart King, a second small Heart and a Club honor. So this time West will not open the bidding. Note: while the play is tricky on this hand, hopefully you will have an appreciation of the repeated finesse coupled with creating an entry by unblocking.

```

S   K Q
H   8 6 5 4
D   7 6
C   K 10 9 8 3

```

```

S   J 10 9 8 7 6 +-----+ S   5 4 2
H   9 7           |         | H   K 3 2
D   A K           |         | D   5 4 3 2
C   Q 7           +-----+ C   J 6 5 4

```

```

S   A 3
H   A Q J 10
D   Q J 10 9 8
C   A 2

```

As usual, West begins with the Spade Jack starting the promotion race. As we saw above, we are one trick too late on the Diamond suit. While we will probably win four Club and two Spade tricks, the opponents will win three or more Spade tricks and two Diamonds to set the 3 Notrump contract. Perhaps South can try a repeated finesse in Hearts this time.

So after the Spade Jack lead, let's play the dummy King - not the Ace. We want to begin our Heart finesse tactic right away. In a moment, you'll see a sneaky way to use the Spade Queen as a second entry. After winning the first trick, dummy plays a Heart to South's 10 and the trick holds (East chose not to play the King). Next we win the Club Ace – this time West plays an unhelpful low Club 7. Still, we play a second Club to dummy's King. We continue the Club promotion, knocking out East's remaining Jack – their last possible winning card in the suit. What shall we pitch from South?

```

S   K
H   8 6 5
D   7 6
C   10 9 8

```

```

S   J 10 9 8 7 6 +-----+ S   5 4
H   9           |         | H   K 3
D   A K           |         | D   5 4 3 2
C   --           +-----+ C   J

```

```

S   A
H   A Q J
D   Q J 10 9 8
C   --

```

Before throwing a Diamond from the South hand, recall that we desperately need dummy entries to win the promoted Club suit and repeat the Heart finesse. Unfortunately, there are no more entries when South holds the Spade Ace, so it appears we cannot get the King. Yet when we stop to think about it for a moment, we know the dummy's King is just as good as our Ace, so let's pitch the Ace and we have found that precious dummy entry! While this seems like a strange unblocking measure, we should live by the credo,

"desperate times call for desperate measures!" True, South no longer can play a Spade to get to the dummy, yet the opponents are stuck promoting your suits and eventually must play to your precious Spade King entry.

Don't worry about learning subtle unblocking play as we've shown here – many strong players could easily miss this line of play or try other sensible tactics. Yet hopefully you have a better appreciation of promotion, entries, and finesses. Each tactic has its place, often with just a card or two changing places. So be on the lookout and let your creative juices flow.

[Also see Distribution Points - the Mathematics of Promotion](#)



Laws and Jargon: No "Coffeehousing" Please

In the early days of cards played in Europe, the game was frequently played in coffee houses. Back in those days, the game had few rules with frisky conversation and hidden signals considered part of the sport. Over the years, the Laws recognized that skill should prevail over such antics and established rules to restrict these tactics.

So the term coffeehousing refers to improper remarks, gestures, hesitations or the like, with the intention to either mislead opponents or send an unlawful signal to one's partner. While this may be fair game in Poker, quite the opposite is true in our fair game of Bridge.

On the lighter side, after numerous deliberate opponent hesitations, professional Charles Goren advised his opponent, "Madam, that second hesitation certainly was an overbid!" Similarly, George Kaufman once retorted to opponents, "Let's have a review of the bidding again, with all the inflections."

[Law 73](#) is clear about our ethical standards referring to communication with partner, unauthorized information, variations in tempo or manner, and deception. Here's a noteworthy appendix to the Law: "Any player may properly attempt to deceive an opponent through a call or play, so long as the deception is not protected by concealed partnership understanding or experience. It is entirely proper to avoid giving information to the opponents by making all calls and plays in unvarying tempo and manner."

So on the last point, if your normal tempo of play is several seconds, you do not have to immediately play a singleton – it's okay to smoothly play the singleton in normal tempo and cadence. However, it would be entirely unethical to make special gestures or hesitate in an attempt to mislead an opponent.

[Learn more about Law 73 - Communications, Unauthorized Information, Variations in Tempo or Manner, and Deception](#)



The Rule of 15

Bidding: "Rule of 15" - Also known as "Pearson Points" or "Cassino Points", this refers to a secondary hand evaluation methodology when a hand does not have sufficient strength to open bidding using a traditional point count. The idea here is that a player holding a long Spade suit ought to immediately take the initiative by entering the bidding. After all, Spades are the "master suit", allowing the partnership to win the auction when competing at the same level as the opponents.

The Rule of 15 is typically used by the player in the fourth seat. The player first counts traditional High Card Points, then adding 1 point for each Spade held in their hand. If the cumulative sum is 15 or greater, the Rule of 15 advocates opening the hand for bidding. Some like the thought of competing vigorously enough to use the Rule of 15 in the third seat as well. Here's a few hands:

```
S  A K Q 3 2
H  J 10 9 2
D  5 4
C  3 2
```

On the above hand, we have 10 HCP and 5 Spades. So $10 + 5 = 15$, enough to open **1S** in the fourth seat.

```
S  K 10 8 4
H  A K J 3 2
D  5 4
C  3 2
```

This time we have $11 \text{ HCP} + 4 \text{ Spades} = 15$, enough to open. Of course, we'll open **1H** since we have a nice 5 card Heart suit. So what happens when we have neither a 5 card Spade or Heart suit?

```
S  5 4 3 2
H  A Q 2
D  K Q 10 9
C  10 9 8
```

With 11 HCP and 4 Spades = 15, we should open in the fourth seat, this time **1D**. While we can't immediately benefit with our 4 Spade suit, perhaps our partner will bid 1S with a four card Spade suit. Yes, the Spade spots are miserable but we still adhere to the principle to prioritize a possible major suit fit.

Next month we will consider another secondary hand evaluation methodology, the "[Rule of 20](#)".

[Learn more about the Rule of 15](#)



Leads: The Good, The Bad, The Terrible

Next month we will also discuss opening leads. Here's an overview of leads from best to worst when opponents are in a suit contracts:

1. Lead the suit bid (or implied) by partner
2. Avoid leading the suit bid by opponent
3. Lead a strong combination, such as an honor sequences, a suit headed by the Ace-King, or a side- suit singleton (assuming appropriate trumps and partner entries to help you ruff)
4. Avoid leading an unsupported Ace, one without an accompanying King, and avoid underleading an Ace
5. Avoid underleading an unbid single honor suit, such as leading away from a King or Queen
6. Dread leading a singleton trump except when it's correct to help partner draw trump (opponents have sacrificed, partner is known to have a long trump suit, they will likely cross-ruff)

Stay tuned...

[Learn more about Opening Leads](#)

We hope you have been enjoying the BridgeHands eMag Newsletter. Feel free to forward interesting topics to your friends. We look forward to hearing from you with your suggestions for future Bridge topics as well as your feedback.

Sincerely,

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