

RESISTING TEMPTATION

Reg Busch



Do optimists or pessimists make the better bridge players? Who knows? But the mathematics of teams scoring requires you to be an optimist. When things look bad as dummy hits the table, you need to be optimistic - decide how the cards must be distributed to make your contract and play accordingly. On the odd occasion when this works, opponents will grudgingly admire your skill at placing the cards. But this was not so much skill as just optimism at work. On the other hand, when your contract looks quite safe, now you must become a pessimist. What can go wrong here? Can I insure against it? To me, this seems more

important in these days of computer generated hands, where there seems to be some demon in the computer who ensures that outstanding cards never break 3-3 (except when you don't need it), and that singleton kings are sitting over your AQ suits.

Here is a hand which I struck at the table in a recent club pairs (directions changed for convenience). I held as dealer South with NS vul:

♠K9 ♥AQ74 ♦Q96 ♣KQ85

Bidding:	W	N	E	S
				1♣
	P	1♦	1H	1NT*
	P	3NT	All pass	
		* 15 – 18		

West led the ♥8 and here are the two hands.

♠10653
♥K2
♦AJ843
♣A3

♠K9
♥AQ74
♦Q96
♣KQ85

I have seven top tricks, and obviously two more will come from the diamond suit provided the finesse works. I have to hope that the finesse will work because I can't afford to let East in to lead through my ♠K9. But wait! East made that

overall with a terrible heart suit – surely he must have values outside hearts? Then I realised that, if the diamond finesse is working, and provided I can afford to lose one diamond trick, I don't need to take the finesse at all. I can play up to the ♦A, then back to my ♦Q. West can win his ♦K, but now I make at least three diamond tricks, however the suit breaks. West can do me no harm. A spade switch just sets up an extra trick for me.

So I resisted the temptation to finesse and played up to the ♦A, dropping East's singleton ♦K! Now the diamond spots allowed me to make all five diamond tricks plus the ♠K later for twelve tricks.

All four hands:

	♠10653	
	♥K2	
	♦AJ843	
	♣A3	
♠J872		♠AQ4
♥83		♥J10965
♦10752		♦K
♣1062		♣J974
	♠K9	
	♥AQ74	
	♦Q96	
	♣KQ85	

Note that, even if I had finessed to the bare ♦K, my contract was safe as the cards lay because of the spade holding. But what would you do as South if East had won the ♦K, and switched to a sneaky ♠4?

Here is another instance of resisting temptation.

Here is your holding in the heart suit. Partner has a huge hand, and has put you into 7H! There are outside tricks to burn but you need to make all six tricks in hearts:

AQ6
987543

Clearly your only hope is to finesse the ♥Q, then play the ace, dropping the ♥K. So you need the finesse to work **and** the suit to break 2/2. Not good odds, but your only chance.

Now suppose you are only in 6H, and need only five tricks from this suit. Do you take the same line? Now you need the finesse to be on **or** the suit to break 2/2 – quite good odds.

We tend to forget that there are two ways of finessing against the ♥K. Thus you can play up to dummy, and play the ♥Q immediately. Or you can play up to dummy's ♥A, come back to hand in a side suit, and then play up to the ♥Q. West can make his king now or later, or, if West doesn't hold the king, East makes it but the suit has divided 2/2 and five tricks are safe. Sometimes you will give up a trick you don't have to lose in order to guarantee your contract.

	AQ6		AQ6		AQ6		AQ6
K2	J10	KJ10	2	J102	K	10	KJ2
	987543		987543		987543		987543
	#1		#2		#3		#4

Some possible layouts above. In #1, finessing the queen and playing the ace will make all 13 tricks. In #4, no matter how you play, you must lose two heart tricks and you are off. In #2, you can successfully play to the ♥Q first (or the ♥A first provided you then come back to hand to play up to the ♥Q next). But in #3, if you finesse the queen at trick one, you now must lose two hearts and are off.

The only play to guarantee your 6♥ contract is to play to the ace first. This will cater for hand type #3. It gives up on your chance of making 13 tricks, but guarantees 12 tricks.

These two plays are types of 'safety' plays. The aim in the first example is to keep the perceived danger hand off lead. In the second example it is to cater for possibly rare distributions to guarantee your contract. Do you always use safety plays? At teams scoring, it is a no-brainer. **Always** use safety plays at teams. You may often make 1430 as against -1460 for a 1 imp loss. But occasionally, when the hand is as in #3, you will score +1430 and +100 for a +17imp win.

At matchpointed pairs scoring +1430 from your safety play is being compared with perhaps lots of +1460s. Safety plays that give up a trick unnecessarily to cater for unusual distributions will only occasionally pay off as good scores and most of the time will score poorly. So at matchpoints, safety plays of this type are only for hands where you assess that just making your contract will be a good score.