

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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28. Deference to the Queen

Quite often in Bridge, one needs to go beyond computing just the raw probability of success and consider the *consequence* of failure. For example, the chance of a successful finesse is 50% but if it fails and goes to the wrong hand, the contract might be in jeopardy. This kind of consideration takes one beyond the probability theory and charts a new territory called *Decision Theory*. Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician, physicist, and philosopher first made inroads into decision theory by considering a wager on the existence of God --- the so-called *Pascal's wager*. This can be summarized in this simple form:

Let's assume that the probability of the existence and the non-existence of God are both equal to 50% (like the finesse working or not working in Bridge). However, a rational person should always believe in God and live a pious life. For, if one lives a sinful life and God exists (finesse fails and goes to the wrong hand), the consequence is eternal damnation (a cold contract getting set). Given this, a rational person should be willing to settle for the boring, pious life (and not take finesse to the danger hand).

Not taking finesse to a danger hand is a well-known topic in Bridge. This, however, leads to a corollary for the defense which is not often appreciated: if you are a danger hand, you should seriously consider playing *second hand high* to foil declarer's plan to let the safe hand win the trick.

My topic on declarer play for this week is on a related subject, the so-called *Avoidance Play*. An example will make this play clear:

	A 9 8 5 4	
J T 6		Q 7
	K 3 2	

You are in 3N contract and you need 4 tricks from the above Club suit. However, West is the danger hand and if he wins any trick, your contract will be set. If East wins you have no problem. How do you play the C suit? If your plan is to play the King first and then duck a trick to West, he will foil your plan by unblocking the Queen under the King. Now, you cannot set up the C suit without letting West get in.

The solution is to play the 4 from North and when the Queen appears duck immediately. This is the humble submission and respect to the Queen --- the *Deference*.

Here is another example.

	A K 3 2	
Q 8 7		J T 9
	6 5 4	

You need 3 tricks in this C suit and here East is the danger hand, waiting in the bushes to set your contract. Try the deference to the Queen play. Play the 4 from South and if Q does not show up, win the A. Enter South hand via another entry and play the 5 of C. Duck if Q shows up otherwise win the K and play a third C from North.

As we are talking about Avoidance play, I cannot finish this column without mentioning two famous and brilliant avoidance plays by the Blue Team Italian masters. The first one is by Belladonna and the next one is by Forquet.

Belladonna's Avoidance Play:

	J 9	
	K 4	
	J T 8 7 6	
	A 7 6 4	
K 4		2
Q T 8 7		A 9 6 5
K 9 5		Q 4 3 2
K Q 9 3		J T 8 2
	A Q T 8 7 6 5 3	
	J 3 2	
	A	
	5	

Belladonna as South is in 4S. West leads the D-5. You are losing one spade trick and must keep the H loser to 2 i.e. the third H needs to be ruffed in dummy. However, note that the danger hand is East who can play a spade through before a H can be ruffed in dummy. How do you play this

hand? After winning the D-A, Belladonna crossed to the dummy with C-A and plays the 4-H !!! This creates a win-win situation for Belladonna: 1) East can win his H-A and only one H will be lost or 2) West can win his Queen but cannot attack S from his side and eventually the other H can be ruffed in dummy.

Forquet's Avoidance Play:

	Q 8 4	
	K 6 3	
	A 7 6 3	
	6 5 2	
J 6 3		5
7		Q J T 9 2
K Q 9 8		J T 4 2
A Q J 9 7		K 8 3
	A K T 9 7 2	
	A 8 5 4	
	5	
	T 4	

Forquet as South plays in 4S. West made an overcall of 2C over 1S by South. West leads the 7 of H which looks like a stiff.

To make 10 tricks one needs to ruff a H in dummy without the defense ruffing either the A or K of H. If you want to break the communications between the East and West hands by playing Cs, *East will win the lead twice*. This will generate 2 H ruffs for defense, felling the King of H. Forquet realized this. He won the H ace, went to the dummy with the diamond A and played the 2 of C from dummy !!! Now East can win only one C trick and give his partner only one H ruff.

I must note that Forquet's brilliant Avoidance play would not come to light if Elizabeth and I are at the table against him. Elizabeth will never let him play in 4S and will take a sac in either 5C or 5D.

Reference:

Guy Leve': The Encyclopedia of Card Play techniques in Bridge.