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Bridge column by Tanna Hirsch

8th October 2011

Dealer : South Vul : None	NORTH ♠ 6 2 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ A 10 9 5 4 ♣ A Q 2	
WEST ♠ A Q 8 5 3 ♥ 7 5 4 ♦ 6 ♣ 7 6 5 3		EAST ♠ 10 9 7 ♥ K 10 3 2 ♦ Q 8 3 ♣ 10 9 8
	SOUTH ♠ K J 4 ♥ Q J 6 ♦ K J 7 2 ♣ K J 4	

South	West	North	East
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass

Opening lead: Five of ♠

The usual purpose of a finesse is to win an extra trick, or set up a suit. But sometimes strategic considerations might dictate finessing into one hand or the other.

While the South hand is dead minimum for an opening bid of one no trump, whether that should have been South's choice is debatable. With no ace or intermediate cards and flat distribution, the hand evaluates closer to 13 than 15! North's raise was simply adding 14 to partner's announced 15 to decide that slam was out of reach.

West led a fourth-best spade, and South captured East's nine with the jack. Since that gave declarer five fast winners outside the diamond suit, only four diamond tricks were needed to land the contract. In order to keep East off lead for a damaging spade return through the king, declarer crossed to the ace of diamonds in dummy and ran the nine. When that held, declarer cashed out the minor suit winners and, if that was the mood of the moment, could afford the heart finesse in an attempt to score a second overtrick.

What about in a pair event? The odds slightly favor playing to drop the queen over the finesse, but the margin is slight: 53 percent to 47 percent.

Narrowing the odds is the likelihood that West has led away from a five-card suit, leaving more unknown cards in the East hand. Since a minus score is disastrous when you could have gone plus, take the safety finesse into the West hand. In a strong event, very few declarers will risk a contract unless the percentages heavily favor some other line.

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