

A Choice of Finesse

As a consistent overbidder, one learns how to minimize damage when you clearly are in over your head...

Holding the following hand, Ivan the Terrible's partner (Vladimir Victim) opened 1NT:

North
S A 7 6
H K 5 3
D J 6 5 3
C A Q J

Ivan bid 2C (Stayman, looking for a major suit fit), holding:

South
S K J 9 8 4 2
H Q J 10 2
D A 7
C 6

When Vlad denied a four-card major by responding 2D, Ivan jumped to 3S, and Vlad bid 4S. The contract looked reasonable, and Ivan received the lead of the King of Diamonds. It looked like the contract depends upon which finesse(s) to take... a diamond loser, a heart loser, and either a club or a spade loser... how best to proceed? What would you do?

If you take a finesse immediately, and it loses, you will also lose a diamond trick immediately, so we do not want to risk losing the lead just yet! Now you are on a guess what to do next! But there is a better play...

Win the opening lead with the ace of diamonds, and play the ace of clubs. Continue with the queen of clubs; if East does not play the King (remember, we don't know where it is...), throw away the losing diamond (a "loser on loser" play). If West wins the trick, you have, at least, eliminated one of those losers, and regardless of the spade and heart holdings, should take 10 tricks.

But if East DOES play the King, you should trump the trick, enter the dummy with the Ace of spades, play the Jack of Clubs and NOW you can discard that pesky losing diamond. This play is guaranteed to make your contract, even if you end up losing a heart and a spade trick.