

# The Fine Art of the Finesse by David Weiss

**Another lost match, more abuse. I can handle the defeats; I can even survive the criticism.**

What gets me is when they nod sympathetically and say they it was bad luck that South had to play so many hands, because it was unreasonable to expect me to stay even with Jude on declarer play. The fact that I take finesses does not make me chopped liver. 50% of them win.

♠ -  
♥ AQJ76  
♦ 109532  
♣ A64



♠ AKQJ8753  
♥ 32  
♦ J  
♣ K3

West	North	East	South
-	1♥	Pass	1NT*
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♠(i)
Pass	3♦	Pass	3♠
Pass	3NT	Pass	5♠
Pass	6♠	All Pass	

(i) Game forcing

Although I felt strongly that a slam was playable once partner opened, I constructed a sequence that left him with the last guess. When that trash was placed on the table, I felt well placed no matter the outcome. After the king of diamonds was overtaken and a trump returned, I drew the rest (East had four) and took the inevitable heart hook. When it lost, I shrugged and hoped they bid it too.

**Unfortunately, they did.**

The play began the same way, but Jude made the contract. Almost legitimately. He ran off six rounds of spades. East pitched a small heart and a small club, without much pain. West, however, had to make five discards, and he didn't enjoy the process. He let go of three diamonds and two hearts. From the dummy, Jude released three hearts, then two diamonds, and finally the heart queen!

The end position was:

♠ -  
♥ A  
♦ 109  
♣ A64

♠ -  
♥ 10  
♦ Q8  
♣ J98

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 53  
♥ 32  
♦ -  
♣ K3

♠ -  
♥ K9  
♦ -  
♣ Q1075

Jude led a heart to the ace, ruffed a diamond, and played the last trump to complete the double squeeze. 'I know how to do squeezes too', I moaned, but how could he explain failing to take a routine finesse? I didn't want to blame my Western teammate for abandoning his heart guard. Jude's explanation didn't really fill me in. 'I was planning to take the finesse, too, David, but when West threw two hearts I couldn't believe he had begun with ♥Kxxx. It was only after the last discard that I gave up on the heart hook.'

♠ -  
♥ AQJ76  
♦ 109532  
♣ A64

♠ 6  
♥ 1085  
♦ KQ8764  
♣ J98

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ AKQJ8753  
♥ 32  
♦ -  
♣ K3

♠ 10942  
♥ K94  
♦ A  
♣ Q10752

Then we bid another slam, similar in that again I had great spades, partner had a rotten opener, and I needed a finesse to make the contract. Maybe I bid too much, but I did have a nine-bagger.

♠ -  
♥ A108742  
♦ 875  
♣ AQ109



♠ AKJ1098764  
♥ 63  
♦ A  
♣ 7

West	North	East	South
-	1♥	2♦	2♠
Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♣	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	7♠
All Pass			

They led a diamond. Trumps were distributed kindly, East having the doubleton queen. I messed around with trumps for a while, but no alternative to the club hook presented itself. It lost and I went down, but surely no one could fault me for bidding it.

**Couldn't partner have been dealt a king?**

When they told me Jude had made the grand, I was stunned. Even seeing all four hands, I couldn't find a winning line. Had my teammates misdefended?

♠ -  
♥ A108742  
♦ 875  
♣ AQ109

♠ 32  
♥ QJ9  
♦ 10964  
♣ J854

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q5  
♥ K5  
♦ KQJ32  
♣ K632

♠ AKJ1098764  
♥ 63  
♦ A  
♣ 7

Jude won the diamond lead and played off seven rounds of spades.

The position was:

♠ -  
♥ A  
♦ -  
♣ AQ109

♠ -  
♥ QJ  
♦ -  
♣ J85

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ -  
♥ K5  
♦ -  
♣ K63

♠ 64  
♥ 63  
♦ -  
♣ 7

On the penultimate spade, dummy could afford to release a club, but neither defender could since Jude was playing the overcaller for the king. Both threw hearts, so declarer went to the heart ace, ruffed his way back to hand and scored the slam. The three of hearts is killing me.



# The Fine Art of the Finesse

So my teammates had misdefended (again!). Why did West woodenly lead partner's suit? Surely declarer was ready for a diamond lead. Couldn't West have tried his heart sequence?

**Those lost IMPs were not my responsibility.**

♠ K7  
♥ AQ63  
♦ Q1054  
♣ AK8

N		
W	E	
	S	

♠ AJ6  
♥ 1072  
♦ 93  
♣ J10972

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

I thought 3NT was an overbid, but it was committed at both tables, so the play's the thing. Against me, the spade nine was led, showing zero or two higher. I produced the Zia manouvre, leading the club jack but spurning the finesse when West failed to cover. Although well judged, my departure from normality was to no avail. East won the third round of clubs and I went down, unable to use the club suit without compressing a spade trick.

Again Jude outplayed me, and he didn't even handle the club suit properly. After winning an ambiguous spade ten with his jack, Jude led a heart. I admit I overlooked the possibility of West's holding ♥KJ doubleton, which would provide an extra entry. But since he didn't have that magical combination, I couldn't see why attacking hearts before clubs could be the correct play.

Jude finessed the heart and then tried two more rounds of the suit. Good news; West had the king, and the suit split. But so what? Doesn't declarer still need the ♣Q to come down early?

No, there was one more little chance. West exited 'safely' with a spade to the king. The fourth heart was cashed, with South tossing a club. After three rounds of clubs, East could not avoid surrendering the ninth trick one way or another.

♠ K7  
♥ AQ63  
♦ Q1054  
♣ AK8

♠ 843  
♥ J84  
♦ AKJ6  
♣ Q63

♠ AJ6  
♥ 1072  
♦ 93  
♣ J10972

East did his best, exiting a small diamond. But Jude produced the crucial nine and claimed.

♠ 84  
♥ 10  
♦ AQ643  
♣ AJ1076

N		
W	E	
	S	

♠ K9762  
♥ AK98753  
♦ -  
♣ K

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
1♠	2♣	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

West's overcall burst my bubble about the prospects for this promising hand, and I settled for game. Just as well, considering partner's standards for an opening bid. In fact, on the nine of clubs lead, my chances of making this conservative contract seemed rather slim. I won the king and set about the trumps. Fortunately, they split nicely, with West having three to the queen. On the low diamond exit, I had my chance to finesse for ten tricks. Evidently West didn't appreciate my entry problem, and was trying to talk me out of my favorite play. Ha! That stratagem didn't work. However, the finesse didn't work either, so I went down.

Once again, Jude was in the same contract, but he chose a luckier line. The early play developed the same way, but Jude didn't finesse the diamond. Instead, he called for a low one from dummy and ruffed East's seven. Then he placed the deuce of spades on the table. East won the trick and played a minor, since he didn't have any major suit cards left.

Had my guys blown another defence? Yes. They could have started with the ace and another spade. But opening leads are hard. All West had to do to recover was to find the reptilian coup of rising with the spade ace, and exit with the obvious jack of diamonds. Then, when declarer ruffs and tries spades again, West can win the ten and get out with any card other than the spade jack. I've just got to find teammates who can take their tricks.

♠ 84  
♥ 10  
♦ AQ643  
♣ AJ1076

♠ AJ1053  
♥ Q64  
♦ J52  
♣ 94

N		
W	E	
	S	

♠ Q  
♥ J2  
♦ K10987  
♣ Q8532

♠ K9762  
♥ AK98753  
♦ -  
♣ K

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