

Brian's Brighton The Summer Meeting 2015

Wednesday 19th – Deep Finesse

As we all know, the double dummy bridge analysis tool Deep Finesse cheats - it peaks so never takes a losing finesse when a missing high card would drop by playing a suit from the top. Sometimes, even knowing that DF plays with sight of all 52 cards, it is hard to see the necessary line of play to come to the number of tricks it assures us are possible. Take this deal from the qualifying session of the Senior Pairs.

Board 24. Dealer West. None Vul.

	♠	7			
	♥	9 8 5			
	♦	K J 9 8 5 2			
	♣	10 8 3			
♠	K 2		♠	A Q 10 9 8 6 3	
♥	Q 7 6 4 2		♥	10	
♦	Q 10 7 3		♦	A	
♣	4 2		♣	A J 9 5	
	♠	J 5 4			
	♥	A K J 3			
	♦	6 4			
	♣	K Q 7 6			

East declares 4♠ and South can lead whatever he likes but cannot defeat the contract. Let's try a top hearts followed by a trump switch, which seems normal enough. Declarer has nine tricks and needs to ensure a club ruff or second club trick for his tenth. The problem is that South will play a second trump as soon as he gets in, thereby killing the ruff. So is there any way to create a second club winner by force or via an endplay? We can eliminate the idea of an endplay quickly enough as South can always arrange to have an exit card, while the combined N/S club spots are just sufficient to prevent declarer having a second club winner by force. Yet DF assures us that 4♠ cannot be beaten (double dummy).

After a while I spotted that if declarer won the spade and cashed the club ace, he could succeed if North followed with the three. Declarer continues with a low club and North, who has no trump to lead, is forced to win with the eight, so declarer gets his ruff. South can only get in to lead a second trump by going in with the queen, but now declarer is in a position to lead the club jack, pinning the ten and establishing his nine as the tenth trick.

Good - we are half way to a solution, but this play is not good enough, because North can unblock the club eight under the ace and now South wins the second club cheaply with the seven and plays a second trump, coming to the king and queen of clubs at the end for down one.

The solution is to win the second trick in dummy with the king of spades, and lead a low club. If North follows with the three, we can follow the ace then a low one line as above, and the defence is powerless, so North must put in either the eight or the ten. But now we duck! If South overtakes with the queen we can later play ace then jack to pin the ten and the nine becomes the game-going trick, while if South does not overtake and play a second trump we get our club ruff.

I think it is rather elegant - when we lead the low club off the dummy, if North plays high we play low, while if he plays low we play high!