

End Plays and Avoidance Plays

A talk by Scott Nason



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Today's Themes

1. Some hands are all about position and timing.
2. Avoidance Plays are about keeping the dangerous hand off lead.
3. End Plays are about making an opponent lead a suit that you want them to lead.
4. Many of the plays we will look at today are not all that difficult, but it is a mindset to

“think to do it”



Avoidance Plays

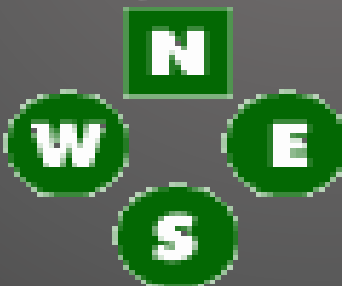
- Often times you can take a finesse one direction or the other or you have a choice of which finesse to take
- Or there is a finesse that you don't want to have to take at all
- In these situations, you may be able to:
 - Play a suit in a particular way to lose to the preferred opponent
 - Take a finesse in the direction in which the “danger” hand won't win
 - Play on one suit instead of another in order to keep the “danger” hand off lead



Our first hand – a classic “avoidance” situation

You open 1NT and partner raises to 3NT. West leads the D5, which is won in dummy with the 8.

♠ J98 ♥ AQT3 ♦ Q98 ♣ QJ98



♠ AK43 ♥ J9 ♦ AT2 ♣ K432

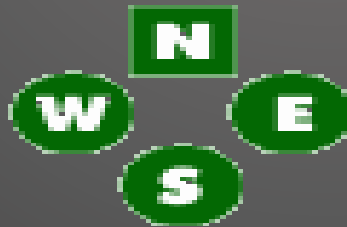


Our first hand – Taking stock

How do you feel? What is your plan?

- We have enough tricks (2S, 3H, 2D, 2C), as long as they don't get 1H, 3D and 1C first
- So what could go wrong?

♠ J98 ♥ AQT3 ♦ Q98 ♣ QJ98



♠ AK43 ♥ J9 ♦ AT2 ♣ K432



Our first hand – Taking stock

The “only” danger is 1) West has five D, not four, 2) East gets in and leads her last diamond, and 3) West gets in to cash three more tricks.

- To prevent this, we need to knock out West’s only possible entry (the CA) before the HK.

♠ J98 ♥ AQT3 ♦ Q98 ♣ QJT9



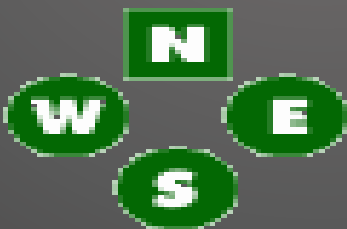
♠ AK43 ♥ J9 ♦ AT2 ♣ K432



First hand – What happened at the table?

I held the West cards. When declarer played a club to the K at trick two, I ducked. Now declarer, inexplicably, changed gears and tried to get home with 2S, 4H, 2D and 1C. She ran the H9 to partner's K. A diamond return doomed the contract, since I now had a club and three diamond tricks coming.

♠ J98 ♥ AQT3 ♦ Q98 ♣ QJT9



♠ AK43 ♥ J9 ♦ AT2 ♣ K432



A Succession of Avoidance Plays

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

You land in 3NT. West leads the HK. First decision: do you let the HK hold?

- Yes. This is your first avoidance play, as West cannot continue hearts without giving you a second heart trick and time to set up three diamonds to go with 3S and 1C.
- So West shifts to a spade. (A D or a C helps you.)

♠ KQ2 ♥ 72 ♦ KJT9 ♣ JT98



♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42



A Succession of Avoidance Plays

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Let's take stock. If nothing "good" happens, you only have 3S, 1H, 3D and 1C, so you need another trick. Do you see how?

- Yes. You need to set up a second club trick before East is able to get in to lead a heart through.
- Win the spade in dummy and run the CJ. The Ds can wait.
- Worst case is that West wins and plays another spade.

♠ KQ2 ♥ 7 ♦ KJT9 ♣ JT98



♠ A864 ♥ AJ ♦ A72 ♣ A42



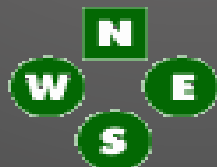
A Succession of Avoidance Plays

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

If West returns another spade, you will, again, win in dummy and run the CT. You now have 2 C tricks to go with 3S, 1H, and 2D, but time to set up a third D.

- By the time East gets in with the DQ, it is too late for the opponents to set up hearts before you take nine tricks.

♠ K2 ♥ 7 ♦ KJT9 ♣ T98



♠ A86 ♥ AJ ♦ A72 ♣ A4



Lose a trick you don't need to

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

West opened 1S and you, unfortunately, bypassed 3NT to play 5D

- West led a diamond. Do you see the danger? Do you see a solution?
- The danger is that East will win a club and lead a spade through your K, giving them 2 S and a club.

♠ 62 ♥ A72 ♦ KJ8 ♣ AK843



♠ K84 ♥ Q ♦ AQT752 ♣ 652



Lose a trick you don't need to

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

West surely holds the SA, so a spade finesse isn't going to work. But West also should hold the HK, and we can use that to pretty much ensure the contract.

- Win the first trick in your hand and lead the HQ.
- If West plays low, then let it run, planning to pitch your club loser on the HA.
- But if West covers with the HK, play low anyway!
- Look at the effect of that.

♠ 62 ♥ A72 ♦ KJ ♣ AK843



♠ K84 ♥ Q ♦ AQ752 ♣ 652



Lose a trick you don't need to

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4♦ A72♣ A42

West will find himself on lead again with no way to win two spades before the clubs are set up.

- You will pitch a club on the HA, then ruff the third round of clubs (high), return to dummy in diamonds, and pitch spades on the two good clubs (assuming that they are 3/2).

♠ 62 ♥ A7♦ KJ ♣ AK843



♠ K84 ♥ ♦ AQ752 ♣ 652



Lose a trick you don't need to

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

This is the same concept, but requires a more extreme implementation.

- West bid spades and hearts before you reached 5D. West led the SQ.
- See the similarity? See the solution?

♠ AK2 ♥ 72 ♦ QJ8 ♣ A8543



♠ 4 ♥ K63 ♦ AKT952 ♣ 762



Lose a trick you don't need to

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

The problem is almost identical, but the solution is a bit harder to spot.

- This time, it is necessary to get rid of two clubs in order to set up the suit without losing to East.
- In order to do so, you need to duck the first trick! After that you will be able to pitch two clubs on the SA and SK. Enter dummy with the CA, pitch your last two clubs, then set up the club suit, using diamonds for transportation.

♠ AK2 ♥ 72 ♦ QJ8 ♣ A8543



♠ 4 ♥ K63 ♦ AKT952 ♣ 762



Lose a trick you don't need to - again

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

This is a slightly different problem:

- You land in 4S and get a lead of the H2.
- What do you make of the lead? Surely it is a singleton, and while you have plenty of winners, you are in danger of losing 2 S, 1 C and a heart ruff.
- How do we draw trumps without letting East lead a Heart?

♠ QT82 ♥ A874 ♦ KT8 ♣ Q3



♠ J9764 ♥ KQJT3 ♦ AQ ♣ 2



Lose a trick you don't need to - again

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Once again, we can lose a trick to West so we don't have to lose to East.

- We will need a bit of luck, but see what happens if we win the first trick in hand, cash the DA and play the DQ and overtake with the K?
- Now we lead the DT and if East does not cover – because she doesn't have it - we pitch our club!

♠ QT82 ♥ A874 ♦ KT8 ♣ Q3



♠ J9764 ♥ KQJT3 ♦ AQ ♣ 2



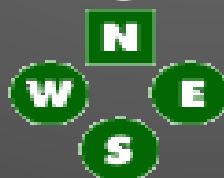
Lose a trick you don't need to - again

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Now we will have to be unlucky in spades for West to be able to put East on lead (in spades), and still be able to ruff a heart with a small spade.

- East would need AK doubleton or the A or K singleton to enable that to happen.

♠ QT82 ♥ A87 ♦ ♣ Q3



♠ J9764 ♥ QJT3 ♦ ♣



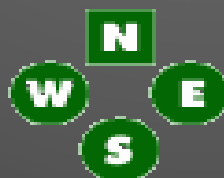
We are getting the idea now, right?

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

You are, unfortunately, in 4S (instead of 3nt), and get a small heart lead.

- You have nine top tricks and the tenth can come from 1) a D finesse, or 2) the long C, if clubs are 3/3 and they don't take three Ds first.
- You've seen this movie.

♠ AJ8 ♥ A74 ♦ K86 ♣ A653



♠ KQ964 ♥ K3 ♦ 543 ♣ K42

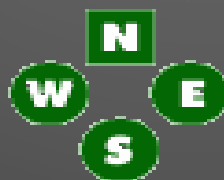


We are getting the idea now, right?

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

You will let East – the SAFE hand – hold the first trick.
- Now whatever is returned, you will be able to pitch a club on the HA, ruff the third round of clubs, and IF clubs were 3/3, you will have your tenth trick without the D finesse.

♠ AJ8 ♥ A74 ♦ K86 ♣ A653



♠ KQ964 ♥ K3 ♦ 543 ♣ K42



Our last avoidance play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

You are in 3NT and get the H4 lead.

- You have 7 top tricks, including the heart you are about to win with the Q and will need 4 C tricks.
- You've been taking finesses like this forever.
- But this is about avoidance plays. What if it loses?

♠ 985 ♥ Q5 ♦ K54 ♣ AKJ52



♠ AK6 ♥ K63 ♦ A762 ♣ 743



Our last avoidance play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

If the opening lead was from Axxxx, then losing a club to East will be fatal. But you **NEED** club tricks.

- There are three possible lies of the clubs: 1) East has the protected Q (you are going down), 2) West has the Q (you are making), or 3) East has the Q singleton or Qx.
- How can we use our lesson to our advantage?

♠ 985 ♥ Q5 ♦ K54 ♣ AKJ52



♠ AK6 ♥ K63 ♦ A762 ♣ 743



Our last avoidance play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

I hope by now you recognize the importance of keeping East off lead if at all possible. And it IS possible, unless they hold the protected Q.

- The key is that, if the finesse is working, then we don't need to take it.
- We can take a safety play of the CA and CK. Maybe the Q falls.
- If West still holds the protected Q, then lead up to the J for our fourth club trick.

♠ 985 ♥ Q5 ♦ K54 ♣ AKJ52



♠ AK6 ♥ K63 ♦ A762 ♣ 743



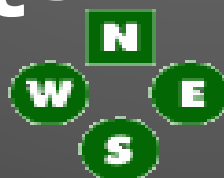
Our last avoidance play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

This avoidance play is also a safety play in which we improved our chances of taking four tricks at the expense of a better chance of taking five.

- In IMPs or rubber bridge, that is clearly the right strategy.
- At matchpoints, you might not feel so smart if West held Qxx in clubs and everyone else made 10 tricks when you made 9. Bridge is a tough game!

♠ 985 ♥ Q5 ♦ K54 ♣ AKJ52



♠ AK6 ♥ K63 ♦ A762 ♣ 743



The end play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4♦ A72♣ A42

The end play is one of the most satisfying, right up there with a well-executed squeeze. There are a few varieties that we will look at, but most involve removing the opponents' safe leads and throwing them in to lead into you.

- Sometimes you must throw in a specific opponent.
- Other times it may not matter which opponent, since their only remaining options will give you a ruff and sluff, resolve a two-way finesse dilemma or force them to break a “frozen suit”



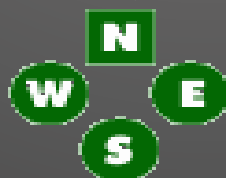
Our first end play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

We will begin with a straight-forward strip and end play in which we will remove their safe leads and force a helpful return.

- We are in 6S and get the HK led.
- We have plenty of winners, but need to not lose 1H and 1D
- We also need spades to be 2/1, in order to avoid the D guess.

♠ A87 ♥ 72 ♦ AJ432 ♣ A64



♠ KT96543 ♥ A6 ♦ KT7 ♣ 2



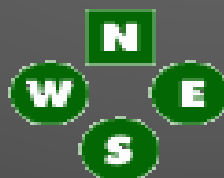
Our first end play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Our plan should be – in the correct order – to pull trumps, play three rounds of clubs so that we are out in both hands, and then lose a H.

- So we win the first trick in hand. This is no time to hold up.
- We lead a club to the A and ruff a club
- We cash the SK, lead a spade to the A, and ruff the last club.

♠ A87 ♥ 72 ♦ AJ432 ♣ A64



♠ KT96543 ♥ A6 ♦ KT7 ♣ 2



Our first end play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Here is the current situation (below):

- If we take a successful diamond finesse, we might make 7.
- Or 5!!!!
- But we have a sure path to 6 by leading a heart.
- No matter who wins, they will have to lead a diamond or give us a sluff and ruff, pitching a diamond from hand and ruffing in the dummy

♠ 8 ♥ 7 ♦ AJ432 ♣



♠ T96 ♥ 6 ♦ KT7 ♣



End-playing the “right” opponent

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

You are in 6NT and get the S3 led (fourth best)

- You count your winners: 3S, 3H, 1D and 4C for 11.
- You look at the possibilities for a 12th: 1) long spade, 2) long heart, or 3) the diamond finesse.
- It would appear that 1) the long spade will not work, 2) the long heart is about 37% and 3) the diamond finesse is 50%.

♠ AKQ2 ♥ 8752 ♦ 2 ♣ AJ64



♠ 654 ♥ AKQ ♦ AQ54 ♣ KQ2



End-playing the “right” opponent

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

But the end-play is pretty close to a sure thing. How?

- We will take advantage of the fact that West (apparently) has exactly four spades.
- We will cash the 4C and 3H and – assuming that nothing very unusual has happened and East, not West started with four H – cash the top spades.

♠ AKQ2 ♥ 8752 ♦ 2 ♣ AJ64



♠ 654 ♥ AKQ ♦ AQ54 ♣ KQ2



End-playing the “right” opponent

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Here is the three-card ending with the lead in dummy:

♠ 2 ♥ 8 ♦ 2 ♣



♠ ♥ ♦ AQ5 ♣

You could take the D finesse, but you know that West now holds one spade and two diamonds. So lead the spade and force West to lead a diamond into your tenace.



The bidding tells you how to end-play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

West opens 2C (Precision), promising at least 6 clubs and 11-15 HCPs. Partner doubles, you bid 2NT and P raises to 3. West leads the CJ.

- You count 2S, 2H, 2D and 1C, with another trick possible in each suit.
- You also count your 27 points and know that East has 0-2, so West must have the SQ or DQ or both.

♠ AKJ2 ♥ Q852 ♦ AT2 ♣ K4



♠ 954 ♥ KJ6 ♦ KJ4 ♣ Q652



The bidding tells you how to end-play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

We are going to use all of these inferences.

- You win the CK in dummy and play a small H to the J, which holds.
- You take the S finesse, losing to East's Q (and only points), so you know how to play the Ds.

♠ AKJ2 ♥ Q852 ♦ AT2 ♣ K4



♠ 954 ♥ KJ6 ♦ KJ4 ♣ Q652



The bidding tells you how to end-play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

East cannot lead a spade away from the T, doesn't have any clubs, and is afraid to lead a H. So she leads a diamond, which doesn't help.

- You win in dummy and have 8 tricks, with the 9th possible if either major breaks 3/3.
- A H to the K and West's A and a D return.

♠ AK2 ♥ Q85 ♦ AT2 ♣ 4



♠ 95 ♥ K6 ♦ KJ4 ♣ Q65



The bidding tells you how to end-play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

After you win in dummy, here is the situation:

- You have won 4 tricks and lost 2.
- You have 2S, 1H and 1D available and hope for another H if they break 3/3.
- So you cash the HQ and get the bad news ... and the good news! West started with 4H.

♠ AK2 ♥ Q8 ♦ 2 ♣ 4



♠ 95 ♥ 6 ♦ K ♣ Q65



The bidding tells you how to end-play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Why is it good news? Because you can safely cash your DK and the two good spades and throw West in with the last heart. All she can have left is clubs and must give you your ninth trick.

♠ AK2 ♥ 8 ♦ 2 ♣ 4



♠ 95 ♥ ♦ K ♣ Q65



The simplest of end plays

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4♦ A72♣ A42

Recently I played a hand in which trumps (spades) broke very badly. My right-hand opponent had a trump stack behind dummy's holding.

- I simply kept taking my tricks, including some ruffs in my hand, awaiting the inevitable.
- With three tricks to go, my RHO says "I get two more"

♠ AQ4

 ♠ 5 ♥ 43



The simplest of end plays

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

I begged to differ, played a heart and called for ... the spade 4.

- East, holding KJT of spades, found that his two “sure” trump tricks had shrunk to one.

♠ AQ4



♠ KJT

♠ 5 ♥ 43



The strip, end and safety play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Here is a hand that looks easy. It is ... if you don't get careless and complacent.

- You are in 4S and figure to lose 1H and 2D. What could go wrong?
- Diamonds might be 4/1 and you might lose 3D.
- Is there a counter-measure?

♠ AJT62 ♥ K8 ♦ K852 ♣ 64



♠ KQ54 ♥ Q43 ♦ Q743 ♣ AK



The strip, end and safety play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Of course. What are we learning today? The strip and end play.

- We will pull trumps and strip the clubs and hearts before touching diamonds.
- Once we have played two rounds of clubs and three rounds of hearts (ruffing the third heart), we will lead a diamond and duck in both hands!

♠ AJT62 ♥ K8 ♦ K852 ♣ 64



♠ KQ54 ♥ Q43 ♦ Q743 ♣ AK



The strip, end and safety play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Whoever wins this trick, we are “home”, assured of at most two D losers. How? What are the possibilities:

1. The Ds are 3/2 and there was never any danger.
2. The Ds are 4/1 and the winner, with 4 Ds, must now lead away from the A or give a sluff/ruff.
3. The Ds are 4/1 and the winner had a singleton and **MUST** provide a sluff and ruff.

♠ AJT62 ♥ K8 ♦ K852 ♣ 64



♠ KQ54 ♥ Q43 ♦ Q743 ♣ AK



The strip and end play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

Now let's look at a sure thing. (We like sure things.)

- You are in 4H and figure to lose 2D and 1 or 2 spades.
- How can we hold our spade losers to 1? Of course!
- We will strip the hand, pulling trumps and playing three rounds of clubs before leading diamonds.
- Once the diamonds are gone, we will lead the SQ.

♠ QT9 ♥ AJ872 ♦ 42 ♣ 642



♠ A43 ♥ KQT96 ♦ 643 ♣ AK



The strip and end play

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

When we lead the SQ, the opponents are sunk. If the K is with East, the best they can do is to cover, leaving you with only the SJ to lose to.

- If West has the K, they will win, but then be forced to lead a spade, pickling the J, or give you a sluff and a ruff. Contract made.

♠ QT9 ♥ A7 ♦ ♣



♠ A43 ♥ K9 ♦ ♣



And One Last Hand

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

You are in 3NT and get a lead of the KC. You count your tricks and have eight on top – 1S, 1H, 5D and 1C.

- The ninth trick can come from a finesse in hearts or spades, but, if clubs are 5/2, you will only get one chance.
- Any better option?

♠ 98 ♥ Q73 ♦ AKJ52 ♣ 642



♠ AQJ ♥ AJ6 ♦ Q643 ♣ A53



And One Last Hand

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4♦ A72♣ A42

Of course. That is why the hand is here! We will start by applying the rule of seven, telling us to hold up one round of clubs and win the second round, East following to this trick.

- Now look what happens after we cash 3 diamonds.
- West will be down to (two or) three clubs and some number of hearts and spades.

♠ 98 ♥ Q73 ♦ AKJ52 ♣ 642



♠ AQJ ♥ AJ6 ♦ Q643 ♣ A53



And One Last Hand

♠ A864 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A72 ♣ A42

So, we will play a CLUB. West will win, take his two more clubs and then be forced to lead into one of our major suit tenaces.

- Contract made
- Note that if we played five rounds of diamonds, we would be squeezed on the last club, forced to come down to a stiff ace in one of the majors.

♠ 98 ♥ Q73 ♦ AKJ52 ♣ 642



♠ AQJ ♥ AJ6 ♦ Q643 ♣ A53



Lessons Learned

1. Pay close attention and look for a danger hand.
2. Look for “two way” situations, where one way is safer than the other.
3. Look for opportunities to “strip” or remove the opponents safe exit cards so that they will be forced to help you when they get in.
4. Sometimes the stripping process will pay even unanticipated benefits.





Questions and Answers

That's all folks!



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