

The Ruffing Finesse

A Ruffing Finesse is a combination of a finesse and a ruff.

This can occur when declarer holds a sequence in one hand and a void in the other. In this layout, South is on lead with spades as trumps:

	Dummy	
	♠ T987	
	♥ --	
	♦ 43	
	♣ --	
West		East
♠ --		♠ --
♥ K65		♥ 432
♦ AKQ		♦ JT9
♦ --		♣ --
	South	
	♠ A	
	♥ QJT	
	♦ 65	
	♣ --	

South has two natural diamond losers but can shed them by leading the ♥ Q toward dummy.

If West covers with the ♥ K, then dummy ruffs. South comes back to hand with the ♠ A and discards dummy's diamonds on the ♥ JT.

If West ducks the ♥ Q instead, declarer throws a diamond from dummy and leads another heart, thereby repeating the ruffing finesse.

Example: West North East South

 1♠ pass 2♠ 3♥

 3♠ 4♥ pass 6♥ All Pass

North

♠ Q
♥ K J 9 6 2
♦ K 9 6 3
♣ 4 3 2

West

♠ K 8 7 3 2
♥ 4
♦ A Q 5 4
♣ K 7 6

East

♠ A 6 5
♥ 3
♦ J 10 8 7 2
♣ J 10 9 8

South

♠ J 10 9 4
♥ A Q 10 8 7 5
♦
♣ A Q 5

Figuring dummy for a spade singleton or void on the auction, South optimistically barrels into 6♥. West's opening lead is the ♠3, won by East's ace. At trick two, East returns the ♣J.

South knows that East should have played the ♠K (the lower of two touching honours) if holding both the ace and king. South can also count 22 [HCP](#) between his hand and dummy, and East has just advertised 5 [HCP](#). Therefore, West should hold both the ♠K and ♣K to justify an opening bid.

South, then, should spurn the club finesse and try a ruffing finesse in spades.

At trick two, he wins the ♣A and proceeds to draw trumps, finding them 1-1.

South now leads the ♠J through West for a ruffing finesse. If West covers, then dummy ruffs and South returns to his hand via a trump to play spade winners, dumping club losers from dummy. If West ducks the ♠J, then South pitches a club from dummy and continues with the ♠T.

Either way, South's losing clubs can be ruffed in dummy to make the contract.

Finesse Vs. Ruffing Finesse

When deciding between a finesse and a ruffing finesse we generally use the information available from the auction to help us determine who is most likely to have the missing honour. Sometimes the play has revealed that one opponent is more likely to have the missing honour than another and then we can use this information to choose between a finesse and a ruffing finesse.

But without any additional information the ruffing finesse has a slightly better chance of success than a traditional finesse. A finesse plays the missing honour to be in one player's hand, while a ruffing finesse plays the missing honour to be in the other player's hand. But in addition, the ruffing finesse combines the chance of the missing honour falling short, offside.

Look for ways to use the ruffing finesse technique when you are pretty sure the traditional finesse will fail!