

North

♠ Q 5

♥ Q 9 8 2

♦ A 7 2

♣ 7 6 5 4

South

♠ A 8 2

♥ A J 10 7 5

♦ K 6 4

♣ A 2

Sitting South you pick up this hand and with 16 HCP plus 1 length point for the 5 card heart suit, you open 1NT. Partner bids 2C stayman, 2♥ by South, 3♥, invitational raise by North and 4♥ is the final contract

The opening lead is the ♦Q.

You immediately count the losers, and you have a potential heart loser, missing the ♥K, two potential spade losers ♠K, ♠J or ♠10. There is a diamond loser after the ♦A and ♦K are gone and finally a club loser once your ♣A is played. That is two more than you can afford so there is some work to do!

You can plan on taking the spade finesse by leading toward dummy's ♠Q, hoping West holds the ♠K.

Even if that doesn't work you can plan on ruffing your third spade with one of dummy's hearts.

In hearts you could plan on taking a finesse by leading hearts from dummy hoping East holds the ♥K. If the finesse works you will end up losing only one spade, one diamond and one club. Let's see what will happen if you simply rely on the heart finesse.

Since you are planning on taking the heart finesse you win the first trick with dummy's ♦A and start drawing trumps by leading dummy's ♥Q, hoping to trap the ♥K in the East hand.

Unfortunately, the finesse loses and West wins the trick with the ♥K.

West continues with another diamond which you win with the ♦K.

Now you are in trouble as you have already lost a heart trick and when you give up a spade trick, the defenders will take their diamond winner and eventually get a club trick to defeat the contract.

This was an actual deal that was played in the 1930's by the British playwright, novelist and short story writer Somerset Maugham. In those days opening 1NT was not the style when holding a 5 card major so Maugham actually opened 1♥. The auction continued 2♥ - 3♥ - 4♥. So, Maugham and his partner reached the same contract but in a slightly different manner.

Let's return to the first trick to see how Maugham played the deal to give himself the best chance for making the contract.

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

When West led the ♦Q Maugham took time to consider the possibilities. Although the heart finesse was one possibility it was only a 50% chance, was there another possibility?

He realised he might be able to eliminate a diamond loser and to accomplish that he would have to make use of the spade suit. He also realised there was no time to lose as the defenders were threatening to develop their diamond winner. He would have to leave the heart finesse in reserve.

So Maugham won the first trick in his hand with the ♦K and immediately tried the spade finesse by leading a low spade toward dummy's ♠Q.

Let's see how this was helpful to the play.

West had no winning option, if he played low dummy's ♠Q would win and declarer would no longer have any spade losers. Declarer could ruff his last spade in dummy. So West won the trick with the ♠K and continued to try and establish a diamond trick by leading the ♦J. Dummy's ♦A won the trick.

Maugham took a trick with dummy's established ♠Q and crossed back to his hand with the ♣A and played the ♠A discarding dummy's last diamond. He led the diamond loser from his hand and ruffed it in dummy, he ruffed with a high heart in case East had no diamonds left. (if East were able to overruff it would have to be with the ♥K which would be ok)

It's time to draw trumps and try the heart finesse, which lost to the ♥K with West, but that didn't matter, West took a club winner but the contract was safe, losing only one heart, one spade, one club but **no** diamond tricks.

Maugham played this hand very well, instead of relying on the 50 -50 heart finesse he gave himself the additional chance of the spade finesse which improved the odds to 70%. If East had held the ♠K, Maugham would have then fallen back on the heart finesse.

In addition to writing such classics as *The Moon and Sixpence* and *Of Human Bondage*, he once wrote “Bridge is the most diverting card game that the wit of man has so far devised”. He continued “ I would have children taught it as a matter of course, just as they are taught dancing; in the end, it will be more useful to them for you cannot with seemliness continue to dance when you are bald and potbellied, nor, for that matter, can you with satisfaction to yourself or pleasure to your partner continue to play tennis or golf when you are well past middle age. But you can play bridge so long as you can sit up at a table and tell one card from another. In fact, when all else fails – sport, love, ambition – bridge remains a solace and an entertainment”.