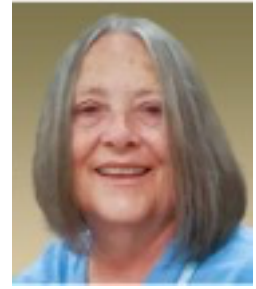


The Finesse And Covering An Honor



By Kitty Cooper

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Recently a novice I know held Qxx opposite Axx in a side suit, so of course she lead the queen for a finesse! I tried to explain to her that this play could never win an extra trick, but since the player holding the king failed to cover, my statement fell on deaf ears. Hopefully our readers can see that if the person with the king played it, the only trick declarer would take would be the ace. There is actually a name for this play, a “Chinese finesse.” Usually employed when you cannot afford any side losers and hope that the player has the king over the queen and does not play it. This can be successful if you have, say, Ax in dummy and LHO has Kxx(x) since if LHO chooses to cover and you have QJ10 he has allowed your 10 to become a trick that you were not entitled to. Therefore he may well choose not to cover.

The purpose of covering an honor with an honor is to promote tricks for your side. This means that if dummy has QJ1098 and you have the king over dummy there is no reason for you to play it, since that cannot establish a trick for your side. If, on the other hand, dummy has Qxx, you should cover with your king, hoping to promote the jack in partner’s hand. It gets tougher when you have Kxxx and dummy has Qx. If you cover when declarer has AJ109 he makes four tricks when he was only entitled to three. On the other hand, if declarer has AJxx and you don’t cover he gets three tricks when he was only entitled to two. This is why Bridge is such a great game. You have to think and weigh the evidence and then guess or judge well. (Many years ago we heard Alan Sontag say that he had “misjudged” the location of a queen; since then we’ve never misguessed, although we all too often misjudge!)

Similarly, the purpose of a finesse is to score a trick with a lower honor when the honor that can beat it is favorably placed. This is easy to see when you hold the AQJ; you are hoping the king is in front of the AQJ so that you can score all three of those cards by leading towards them. If LHO plays the king you play the ace, otherwise you play a lower honor which wins. Apparently it is more difficult to see that with Axx opposite Qxx, you lead towards the queen hoping the king is in front of it. Yes you have to lose a trick but you will get a trick with the queen in return. Losing a trick to gain a trick is often a tough concept for the newer player.

This article was co-authored by Kitty’s husband, the late Steve Cooper, and previously appeared in the District 17 newsletter. ♣