

Inferences - Class 1 with Marshall Miles

SAMPLE  
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Welcome. We are going to deal with various subjects, all pertaining to inferences. If you have any questions during the course of the semester, please don't hesitate to ask me. I can be reached by Email at: marshall.miles2@verizon.net

Now let's begin.

The key to successful play and defense is to visualize the unseen hands. The first and most valuable technique is to determine the distribution. In the following lesson I explain not only how to count the hands but also what you can do with that information.

AQ6  
A106  
KQ87  
AQ9

KJ4  
KJ7  
AJ93  
K72

The bidding is 1NT pass 7NT, all pass, and West leads the ten of spades. Because of the duplication, each hand having the same distribution, you are going to have to guess who has the queen of hearts. In a newspaper column you usually find out that one hand has a singleton so that you can cash a high honor and then have a cinch finesse against the other hand. In real life, you seldom discover that someone has a singleton, but you follow the same general procedure to determine the opponents' distribution. You cash all your winners outside the crucial suit, hoping that someone will show out so as to give you at least a partial count. In this case at least one opponent must show out when you cash four rounds of diamonds.

Both opponents follow to three rounds of clubs. West follows to three rounds of diamonds while East has only two. When you play spades you obtain an important clue. East shows out on the third round. Now you know that West had 5-2-3-3 distribution or possibly 5-1-3-4. (You won't know who has the 13th club unless someone discards a club.) You now have enough information to play the hearts correctly. You cash the ace and finesse the jack on the next round. The odds are at least five to two in your favor since East has five (or possibly six) hearts and West has, at most, two.

You were somewhat lucky that East had a doubleton spade, which helped you immensely in getting an accurate count. However, you were bound to get some sort of clue. Suppose both defenders follow suit to three rounds of both black suits, and the diamonds split 3-2.

The defenders have to make a total of three discards on the diamonds. If someone discards a club, for example, and both opponents follow to three rounds of clubs, at least you will know that the player who discarded a club started with four. On the third round of spades, if West doesn't play the nine, he must have started with four since he would hardly lead the ten without the nine. An expert would play the nine of spades on the third round whether he had to or not, but most defenders would not think of that

falsecard, and that would give you a clue. Somehow or another, you will almost always know, after ten tricks, which defender has the greater length in hearts. It makes you happier when hearts are 5-2 (unless you happen to lose to the doubleton queen), but even when they are 4-3, you have 4 to 3 odds in your favor if you play the longer hand for the queen.

AQ6  
A106  
KQ87  
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KJ4  
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K72

So you don't consider 4 to 3 odds impressive? Suppose you and an opponent were allowed to draw cards from a hat. If you got to draw four cards and he got to draw three, isn't it obvious that you would have a better chance to draw the crucial card?

Against expert and devious opponents, the defender with four small hearts may go out of his way to show you he has four hearts, and the hand with the queen may discard down to the doubleton queen. But most opponents will keep the queen of hearts amply guarded, and it will certainly pay, in the long run, to get a count on the hand. Another small point: Suppose dummy had A10x of hearts and A10x of clubs. Your hand is KJx of hearts and KQx of clubs. It would be a good idea to play your four rounds of diamonds first. The defender who doesn't have the missing queen of hearts won't know whether clubs or hearts is the crucial suit. If he knew, he would keep cards in the crucial suit so as not to give away his partner's holding, but since he doesn't know, he may give the show away.

Q7654  
A8  
KJ62  
Q3

AK3  
KQ9  
A104  
9652

The contract is 3NT. West leads the jack of clubs. You duck in dummy, but East wins the king and ace, then leads the third round. West, who started with CJ1087, wins the third and fourth round of clubs and exits with a heart. (You discarded a spade and a small heart from the dummy on the third and fourth rounds of clubs, leaving the blank ace of hearts in dummy.) How can you take the rest of the tricks?

It will be easy if the spades break 3-2, but when you cash the ace and queen of spades, East discards a heart on the second round. Since the spades split 4-1, you are going to need three diamond tricks. You follow the normal procedure by cashing your sure winners in the other suits, and both opponents follow to three rounds of hearts. What do you know about the opponents' distribution?

Q7654

A8

KJ62

Q3

AK3

KQ9

A104

9652

It is easier to count West's hand than East's. West has shown four clubs and four spades and at least three hearts--consequently no more than two diamonds. Again the percentage play is to finesse through East with 5 to 2 odds in your favor.

There is another clue which, this time, you don't need: East's discards on the fourth round of clubs and the second round of spades. A top expert might try to trip you up, but 99% of your opponents would discard first from their five-card suit. They know their fifth card won't be a winner, nor will discarding it create a winner for you (directly). But it could cost them a trick to discard from a four-card suit since you might have four of that suit. Even when there is no real danger (because you can't have a side four-card suit), players tend to discard their fifth card of a suit as a reflex action, since USUALLY it won't cost. Only when it helps you to count the hand.

At notrump it almost always pays to cash your winners in the suits where there are no options in order to get a count of the opponents' distribution. When your problem suit is trumps, the way to get the most accurate count might be to cash winners until someone ruffs one of your winners. That won't be a good idea when the ruff is the setting trick (and seldom a good idea in any event), so you have to act on less than full information.

AJ7

K954

K642

76

843

AJ1083

Q9

AJ8

You open 1H. West overcalls 2S (weak), and partner bids 4H. West leads the king of spades, which you win with dummy's ace. You have one sure loser in every suit but hearts, so you need to avoid a trump loser (by ruffing or otherwise). West presumably has six spades to East's one. That means West has seven "non-spades" to his partner's 12 "non-spades." West has seven chances of holding the queen of hearts to East's 12 chances. With odds like that, the correct play is to cash the king of hearts and, if the opponents follow suit, finesse the jack or ten on the next round.

96  
 AQJ8  
 Q1076  
 Q75

A4  
 6  
 AKJ9843  
 KJ4

South	West	North	East
1D	pass	1H	3S
5D	pass	6D	(all pass)

West leads the jack of spades, overtaken by East's queen and your ace. What now?

East has seven or eight spades (seven is more probable) to West's one or two. You cash the ace of diamonds and both defenders follow suit. East has (probably) five cards in hearts and clubs to West's ten. East might or might not hold the king of hearts for his 3S bid, but with 2 to 1 odds, based on the distribution, it seems best to take a straight finesse in hearts (through West) rather than a ruffing finesse (through East) to get rid of your spade loser.

QJ985  
 K10  
 KJ96  
 43

K107  
 AJ4  
 Q73  
 AQ85

You are the declarer in 4S (after opening 1NT and a transfer response by partner). West leads the ten of diamonds. East wins with the ace and returns the five of diamonds, which West ruffs. West cashes the ace of spades and leads another spade, both defenders following suit to the second spade. How would you play from this point?

You know that West has three spades and one diamond (to East's two spades and five diamonds). That leaves West with nine cards in hearts and clubs to East's six cards in hearts and clubs. So the odds are 9 to 6, or 3 to 2, that any finesse through West will win and any finesse through East will lose. So your best play is to lead a low heart to the ten spot rather than take the club finesse.

Incidentally, although the major theme of these hands is counting, it doesn't hurt to consider other clues. East could have returned the deuce of diamonds to ask for a club lead (but he didn't), and West didn't return a club. That is another indication that the club finesse won't work. Of course, you could finesse against either defender in hearts, but playing West for the queen is the percentage play.