

Don't Think

by Alfred Sheinwold

Alfred Sheinwold was born in London in 1912 but later settled in the USA, first in New York and later in Los Angeles. During World War II he was chief code and cipher expert of the OSS. Although he was successful on the North American circuit, his greatest triumph was in captaining the US team to victory in the 1985 Bermuda Bowl. He was editor of Bridge World from 1934 to 1963 and of the ACBL Bulletin from 1952 to 1958. He was also a syndicated bridge and backgammon columnist for Los Angeles Times. He was responsible for the development of Autobridge and wrote many bridge books, the most famous of which is Five Weeks to Winning Bridge which has sold more than a million copies.

For fifty years I've been advising bridge players to think. Study technique and think. Count to thirteen and think. Work out the make-up of the hidden hands and think. Always and forever: think.

Now, at last, I have a different song to sing: Don't think! Just in one clear situation, of course. But when you recognize that situation, you must not think.

The recognition is easy: you're a defender and declarer takes a repeatable finesse that is doomed to lose. Don't win the trick. Don't even think of winning the trick. Just play low with normal speed – not too quickly and not too slowly.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ K 9 4 ♥ J 10 9 6 3 ♦ 8 4 3 2 ♣ 7	♠ 7 6 3 ♥ A K 5 ♦ A K Q ♣ 8 5 4 2	<table style="margin: auto;"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px;">S</td><td>E</td></tr></table>		N		W	S	E	♠ 10 2 ♥ 8 7 4 2 ♦ 10 7 6 5 ♣ K 10 9
	N								
W	S	E							
	♠ A Q J 8 5 ♥ Q ♦ J 9 ♣ A Q J 6 3								
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>						
Pass	1 NT	Pass	3 ♠						
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	6 ♠						
All pass									

You are West and lead the jack of hearts. Your job is to beat six spades rather than sniff at South's somewhat simplistic bidding.

After some thought, South takes the first trick with dummy's king of hearts, dropping the queen from his hand, and leads a trump from dummy. Your partner follows with the deuce, declarer plays the queen and you win with the king.

No matter how you continue the defense, South is sure to make his slam. Suppose you switch to a diamond (as good a defense as any). Declarer wins in dummy and tries the club finesse. He draws trumps and returns to dummy with a diamond to repeat the club finesse. He then runs the clubs and makes the slam without using the ace of diamonds or the ace of hearts!

Since you didn't think, you managed to follow half of my advice. But if you go back to the third paragraph, you'll see that you're advised not to win the trick. Don't think, but also play low.

When declarer tries the first spade finesse, play the four of spades as though you had never heard of the king.

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If your play is convincingly casual, South will assume that his finesse has succeeded. He will return to dummy with a diamond to repeat the finesse.

Your mission has now been accomplished. You take your king and lead your last trump (or perhaps a diamond, but certainly not a heart). South can get to dummy just once, with a diamond, so must lose a club trick. Your score is +100 instead of -1430.

Not a bad return for a very small effort.

What's all this hullabaloo about not thinking? Simply that your success may depend on convincing declarer that his finesse has succeeded. In our example, if declarer thinks you have the king of spades he will use his two entries to take club finesses.

Of course, there are hands where you must win when your opponent tries the first finesse. For example, win the setting trick as soon as you can. When your partner has made an opening lead in a decent suit against notrump, win a trick as early as possible to return partner's suit before his entries get knocked out.

There are a few similar situations, but don't worry about them. Unless you absolutely must win the first available trick, play low without thinking when declarer takes a repeatable finesse in your direction. You may gain nothing; declarer's contract may be unbeatable. You'll often gain one or more tricks – perhaps even the setting trick. Only once in a blue moon will you lose by not taking your trick promptly. But if you take time to think matters over, you'll lose far more often.

One last word: train your partner not to reach for the trick when a finesse is taken in your direction. Reaching for the trick unmasks you no matter how casually you've produced a low card.

My BOLS bridge tip is:

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