

Finesse Fatale

By Brian Gunnell

Board 19
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

<p>♠ K 5 3 ♥ K Q 10 2 ♦ Q 9 8 7 2 ♣ J</p>		<p>♠ J 9 4 ♥ 5 ♦ A J 6 4 3 ♣ 7 5 4 2</p>	<p>♠ 2 ♥ A J 9 8 4 ♦ K 10 ♣ Q 9 8 6 3</p>
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	<p>♠ A Q 10 8 7 6 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ 5 ♣ A K 10</p>		
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	West	North	East	South
				1 ♠
	Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♠
	Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

4 ♠ by South
 Lead: ♥ K

North-South reached their spade game one baby step at a time and West led the ♥K. Seeing the danger of heart ruffs in dummy, East overtook with his ace and smartly shifted to a trump. That was sensible defense, now what would be sensible declarer play?

It may seem routine to finesse the spade, but that would be fatal. West wins his king and returns another trump. Oops! Now declarer has only one heart ruff in dummy and is down one! The correct play is easy enough if declarer counts his tricks. He has three side-suit winners, and if he can get two heart ruffs in dummy, then he can make do with just five trump tricks in his own hand. Ten easy tricks, but only if declarer makes certain of both ruffs by hopping up with the ♠A at trick two. The full line of play is: ♥A; ♠A; heart ruff; ♦A; diamond ruff; heart ruff; diamond ruff; then play on trumps.

As declarer was engineering those heart ruffs he did well to return to hand with diamond ruffs. If he had attempted to use the ♣A and ♣K as his entries then he'd have got a nasty shock when West ruffed the second club for down one.

How about an opening trump lead? Does that set four spades? Actually, no! Declarer wins and plays a heart. If East wins that trick he cannot play another trump, and dummy gets the two ruffs ... and if West wins he can lead a trump to stop the second ruff, but only at the expense of his natural trump trick. A club opening lead is no better for the defense because, although the defense is able to arrange a club ruff, that comes at the expense of their natural club trick.