

The Advancing Player

Lessons From Deep Finesse & Morton's Fork



By Maritha Pottenger

Now that most people have hand records for most games – and most hand records include the summaries of makeable contracts from Deep Finesse – people get more ammunition for beating themselves up.

It is important to remember that Deep Finesse can see all four hands when making its analysis. That is what “Double Dummy” means. So, Deep Finesse will drop that doubleton Queen offside when a normal human being takes the percentage play of finessing. Deep Finesse can find strange, esoteric plays (such as finessing to an 8 or 9, or running a 9 to smother a singleton 8, etc). Berating yourself (or a partner) for not finding such plays is pointless. (Or, as defender, leading an Ace in the suit bid by Dummy so that partner - who happens to have a singleton - can get a ruff.)

However, there are times when Deep Finesse forces us to take a longer look at one hand, and find a line of play that is reasonable, but perhaps more subtle than we would have seen at first glance. With Deep Finesse assuring us that extra trick(s) are available, we work harder for the solution.

An example hand is Board 15 from the Junior Fund Game on January 24. The winning line is a combination of Morton’s Fork and an end play based on count. South passes and West opens 1NT (15-17). North bids 2♣ or 2♦ or whichever system N/S uses to show both majors. Most pairs will play 3NT, taking nine tricks on a heart lead when the club finesse succeeds.

However, Deep Finesse assures us that 6♣ from the West side of the table will make. (It cannot make from the East side because South can lead a “psychic” diamond, giving partner a ruff E/W will still have one more diamond loser and a possible spade loser to deal with.) Morton’s Fork is based on a tax collector from the 15th Century - John Morton - Archbishop of Canterbury. If a family had a nice house, Morton would say they must be wealthy, so can pay taxes. If the family had a poor dwelling, the tax collector would say they must have saved lots of money, so could pay taxes. This was known as being caught on “Morton’s Fork.” In bridge, the term refers to a play where Declarer leads low toward an honor and if second-hand defender takes his/ her honor, Declarer gets an extra trick. However, if the second- hand defenders ducks the honor, Declarer’s remaining loser in that suit is discarded on something else.

	North	
	♠QJ752	
	♥QJ8654	
	♦--	
	♣32	
East		West
♠K98		♠A64
♥A7		♥2

<p>♦Q42 ♣AQ975</p>	<p>♦AJ765 ♣J1064</p>
South ♠103 ♥K1093 ♦K10983 ♣K8	

Dlr: South
Vul: N/S

Declarer (West) will win the ♥A (♥Q most likely lead) and ruffs a heart in East. The club finesse is successfully taken, and trumps are removed in two rounds. Then Declarer leads a third club back to East and now plays a low diamond toward the ♦Q in Dummy. If South wins the ♦K, then Declarer will be able to discard a losing spade from the West hand on East's ♦J. Declarer loses only one diamond trick.

South does no better to duck the ♦K. East now cashes the two top spades (removing all of South's spades) and concedes a spade trick to North (who has no diamonds and no trump at this point). North must lead a heart or a spade – giving Declarer a ruff-and-sluff. Declarer discards a diamond from the West hand and ruffs in the East hand – claiming 12 tricks, losing only one spade trick.

Another famous example of Morton's Fork comes from Charles Goren and Omar Sharif.

		North ♠Q106 ♥A74 ♦J65 ♣KQ64		
West ♠7 ♥KQJ983 ♦K103 ♣A105		East ♠43 ♥10632 ♦987 ♣9873		
		South ♠AKJ9852 ♥-- ♦AQ42 ♣J2		

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl
2♥	3♥	Pass	4♠
Pass	6♠	All Pass	

Opening Lead: ♥K

South knows that West has all the outstanding HCP, and it appears Declarer must lose one trick in each minor. However, Morton's Fork comes to the rescue. Duck the opening heart lead and ruff in the South hand. Pull two rounds of trumps and lead a low club. If West wins the ♣A,

Declarer can unblock ♣J, and go to Dummy with a trump. Two of South's diamonds are discarded on the ♣K and ♣Q, and the third losing diamond goes on the ♥A. Defenders win only one club trick.

West does no better to duck the ♣A. Declarer wins on Dummy and discards the ♣J on the ♥A. Declarer loses only the ♦K.

Morton's Fork strikes again!