

When to Follow “8, Ever; 9, Never”

Masterclass, March 2024

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2. Playing for the drop

Cashing the A and K and hoping the Q falls singleton or doubleton

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The guideline “8, Ever; 9, Never” is a handy way of remembering which is more likely to work, remembering that the fewer cards the opponents hold in the suit, the more likely it is that the Q is in a short holding.

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With 9 or more cards in the suit (“Never”=“never finesse”)

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This guideline is there to remind you **at what point the probabilities tip** in favour of the alternative play **as the suit gets longer or shorter.**

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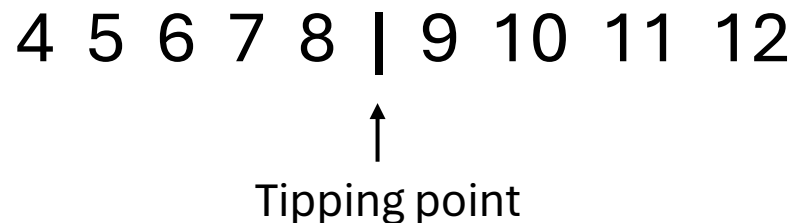
4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

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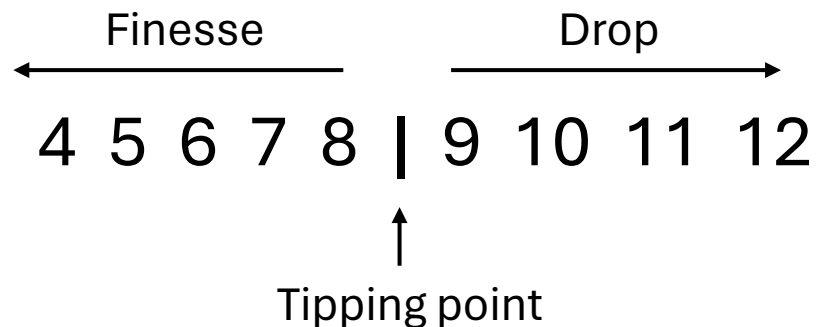


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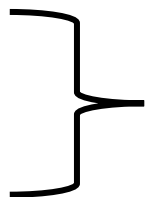
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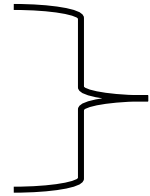
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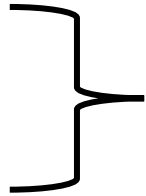
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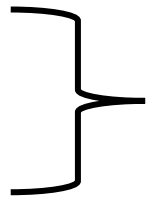


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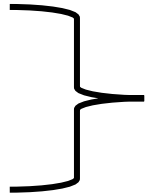


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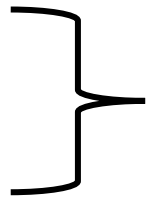


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Drop

Eight, Ever

Why should you take the finesse with 8 cards in the suit?

AKJ2

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There are 2 opponents who might hold the Q, so hoping that LHO holds it is $1/2$
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There are 3 possible slots for the Q in the 3-card holding; there are only 2 possible slots for the Q in the 2-card holding.

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There are 3 possible slots for the Q in the 3-card holding; there are only 2 possible slots for the Q in the 2-card holding.

So the doubleton Q is $2/5$ **= 40%**

Nine, Never

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If the suit is 2-2 (40%) or 3-1 (50%), you will not have to lose a trick in the suit if you correctly guess how to capture the Q.

Here, you need to remember that you will start out by cashing one of the big honours no matter what you plan to do next.

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Why not finesse? 3-1 is more likely than 2-2...

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However, it is not 50/50.

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Remember that LHO has 11 unseen cards, whereas RHO has 12.

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You have now seen all the cards except for the Q, which could be in either hand.

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Remember that LHO has 11 unseen cards, whereas RHO has 12.

Of the 23 total unseen cards, the chance that the Q is in LHO's hand is **11/23**, whereas the chance that it is in RHO's hand is **12/23**.

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Therefore, you should play for the drop.

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LHO has 11 spaces for the Q = **11/23 ($\approx 48\%$)**

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To summarise:

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LHO has 11 spaces for the Q = **11/23 ($\approx 48\%$)**

2. Playing for the drop

RHO has 12 spaces for the Q = **12/23 ($\approx 52\%$)**

But...

Remember that these
probabilities assume no prior
knowledge of the hand!

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Therefore:

- A 1-card difference in distribution info between the opponents' hands is not enough to make the finesse more likely.
- A 2-card difference is enough to make the finesse more likely.

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(1) You know:

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- Lead
- Showing out
- Counting HCP

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- If they have 8, you know LHO has 5 and RHO has 3.
- If they have 9, it is more likely that LHO has 6 and RHO 3 but not certain: the ♠ could still be 5-4 if RHO is very balanced.

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Against a NT contract, this usually rules out LHO having a 5-card suit elsewhere; if you are missing 9 cards in a different suit, RHO will have at least 5 of them, which may provide an extra clue.

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Make sure you are not risking getting ruffed or opening suits up needlessly.

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(2) If an opponent opened 1NT (15-17) and you and your partner bid game with 25 HCP, his partner cannot have the Q, which may affect your play in the key suit.

Now head to the
When to Follow “8, Ever; 9, Never”
tournament
and try the practice hands!