

THE ORDER OF PLAY

Your RHO has passed and you open 1♠ with this hand in the South seat:

♠ KQ1072
♥ K73
♦ KJ8
♣ Q4

After West passes, your partner bids 2♦. You are playing the 2 over 1 system, where a 2-level response is game forcing. This allows you and partner to bid leisurely until you find a fit and then bid game in that strain, as a minimum. Of course you may want to go on to slam.

You have no other suits to bid. You can't rebid your spades because that promises 6 spades. You bid 2NT to show a balanced hand with only 5 spades. Because partner started with a game forcing response, your 2NT is now forcing. You have not reached game so both partners must keep bidding.

Your partner raises your 2NT to 4NT. This is not the Blackwood convention. You have not agreed to a strain so this rebid is an invitation to bid 6NT if you hold a near maximum for your opening bid range. He probably has 17-19 or so points. This is called a "quantitative" raise, because it is based on point count. Since you have 15 total points, you feel good about raising to 6NT.

West leads the ♦6 and this dummy comes down. Plan the play:

North	
	♠ A8
	♥ AJ10
	♦ A9532
	♣ A97
West	
	♦6
	♠ KQ1072
	♥ K73
	♦ KJ8
	♣ Q4

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
Pass	2♦	Pass	2NT
Pass	4NT	Pass	6NT
All Pass			

In a slam contract, whether it is in a suit or notrump, you want to count winners. You need 12. You hope to take all 5 spades. That requires either a 3-3 split (35% probability) or the ♠J

being in the East hand (50%). You have 2 hearts, 3 diamonds (given the lead), and 1 club. You are 1 trick short. Other than spades, you have two finesses available; one against the ♥Q and the other against the ♣K. You should plan to take the spade finesse because it has a higher probability of success than the 3-3 split. But which of the other two finesses should you take first.

This is a typical play problem. If you take the heart finesse first and it loses, then when you lead to the ♣Q, no matter who holds the ♣K, he will take the setting trick. However, if you lead to the ♣Q and the ♣K is in West, you can fall back on the heart finesse.

But what is the order of play? Which finesse do you take first?

Take the spade finesse first. If it loses, you can't afford the club finesse. If the spade finesse is working, go to the dummy and lead to the ♣Q. If East rises with the ♣K, the ♣Q is the necessary 12th trick. If the club finesse fails, try for the extra trick in hearts: lead to the ♥10 in the dummy

Here is the entire deal:

	N North ♠ A8 ♥ AJ10 ♦ A9532 ♣ A97	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>W</td> <td>N</td> <td>E</td> <td>S</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>P</td> <td>2♦</td> <td>P</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>P</td> <td>4NT</td> <td>P</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>6NT</td> </tr> </table>	W	N	E	S		P	P	1♠		P	2♦	P		P	4NT	P		P	P	6NT
	W	N	E	S																		
	P	P	1♠																			
	P	2♦	P																			
	P	4NT	P																			
	P	P	6NT																			
W West ♠ 543 ♥ Q9864 ♦ 6 ♣ J1053	E East ♠ J96 ♥ 52 ♦ Q1074 ♣ K862																					
	S South ♠ KQ1072 ♥ K73 ♦ KJ8 ♣ Q4	6NT S NS: 0 EW: 0																				

Notice that the spades did split 3-3 and all the finesses were working. This is very unusual, but it does sometimes happen. Nevertheless, you always want to play in the safest way by going with the percentages. But more critical was the order of play: taking the suit first, that allows you to fall back on a safer finesse if the first one fails.

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/h767dor> , or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the “Next” button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on “Play” you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.