

♠♥♦♣ **THINK END PLAY** ♠♥♦♣

East, the dealer, passes and you open 1♣ with this minimum balanced hand.

S	South
♠	AJ10
♥	Q84
♦	632
♣	KQ97

West, the LHO, doubles and partner responds with 2♣. This, in your system, denies a 4-card major and promises at least 4 clubs. You should be a little nervous about West's double and his partner's pass. This indicates that West probably has the best hand at the table, and you should look for a safe part score. You should be satisfied to play in clubs, so bid 3♣ to show valid club suit, in case partner has an unusual distribution and wants to proceed.

Your 3♣ bid is passed out and West leads the ♦A.

N	North
♠	6542
♥	AK
♦	1097
♣	AJ106

West leads ♦A

S	South
♠	AJ10
♥	Q84
♦	632
♣	KQ97

You are going to lose 3 diamonds and at least 1 spade. That's all you can afford. But West's double and his partner's pass indicates he probably holds both missing spade honors, so your double spade finesse rates to lose. Is there anything better you can do?

When you have a difficult finesse problem, think end play.

An end play, also called a throw in play, is where you arrange to get your opponent to help you play a difficult suit. If West leads a spade into your hand, you can make one of your minor honors take a trick. In order to force him to lead a spade you must remove the ability to lead a suit such that you must win it and lead the spades yourself.

Therefore, after you lose the first three diamonds you regain the lead. You unblock the ♥AK and return to your hand in clubs, drawing the opponents trump. Then you cash the ♥Q discarding a spade from dummy. Now comes the critical play. You throw West in the lead by playing the ♠J. He has only spades left along with a 4<sup>th</sup> diamond. If he leads the spade you take 2 spades to go along with your 3 hearts and 4 clubs. If West, instead, chooses to lead his last diamond, you ruff it in the dummy and discard your losing spade in your hand. You've substituted 5 club tricks for one of the spade tricks.

End plays require three elements:

- Recognition that a suit is better led by the opponents than yourself
- The ability to strip your hand and the dummy's hand of extraneous suits.
- An exit card that can throw the opponents into the lead when they cannot safely play any other suit than the one you want them to lead.

Look at the entire deal:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">14<sup>D</sup></div>	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ 6542	X	2♣	P	1♣
	♥ AK	P	P	P	3♣
	♦ 1097				
	♣ AJ106				
W West		E East			
♠ KQ9		♠ 873			
♥ J103		♥ 97652			
♦ AKQ4		♦ J85			
♣ 832		♣ 54			
	S South				
	♠ AJ10				
	♥ Q84				
	♦ 632				
	♣ KQ97				
		3♣ S NS: 0 EW: 0			

As effective as end plays are, sometimes there is a way that the opponents can break them up. In this deal, had East won the third diamond, he could have led a spade and broken the end play. West would have won but it would be early enough that he had exit cards himself. His lead of a club would put the declarer back in his hand and he would have no way to avoid a second spade loser. In order for this to happen, East would signal encouragement with the ♦8 on the first diamond lead, showing the ♦J. Then West would take his ♦K and underlead

the ♦4 to East's ♦J. Although this line of play by the defenders is possible, it is very difficult to spot at the table.

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

<https://tinyurl.com/wggkrq5> , 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.

© David Germaine 2019