

Contrast the best way to tackle these two suit combinations to make all five tricks:

- (A) KQ10xx facing AX
(B) KQxxx facing A10

In either case, you can bang down the ace-king-queen; or you can finesse the ten [after cashing the ace in (A); a first-round finesse in (B)]. But which?

In (A) you should bang down the ace-king-queen. You will succeed when the suits splits 3-3, and also (crucially) when the jack drops doubleton.

In (B), you should finesse the ten on the first round. Banging down the ace-king-queen only succeeds when the suit splits 3-3, because the ten is squashed under the higher honours; you will not succeed if the jack is doubleton.

Compare the drop versus the finesse in (B) - when one succeeds but the other fails. The drop (alone) will work when there is Jxx over the ten. The finesse (alone) will work when there is Jx or Jxxx in front of the ten; a greater chance.

The success of Six Diamonds on our featured deal from this year's Lederer Memorial Trophy (see www.metrobridge.co.uk) depended on declarer's play of precisely this suit combination, the seven-card trump fit. My partner Alexander Allfrey made no mistake.

Ducking the club lead (a free shot to win his singleton jack, should West have unfiltered the queen), saw East win the queen, and declarer ruffed a second club. His next move was a trump to the ten (key play). When this finesse

Dealer: North Vulnerability: Neither

Teams ♠ J97
 ♠ A153
 ♠ A10
 ♠ AK42

♠ 832 N ♠ 1054
 ♠ Q10 W E ♠ K942
 ♠ J854 ♠ 93
 ♠ 10865 S ♠ Q973

♠ AK06
 ♠ 876
 ♠ KQ762
 ♠ J

S(Allfrey)	W	N	E
1:	Pass	3NT	Pass
2:	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♠	Pass	5♠(1)	Pass
6♠(2)	End		

- (1) Ace-showing cue-bid.
(2) Expecting North to convert to spades with an un-disclosed fit.

Contract: 6♠ Opening Lead: ♠5

succeeded, he could cash the ace, cross to the ace of spades, cash the king-queen of trumps drawing West's remaining trumps, then follow with his top tricks. 12 tricks and slam made.

One or two North-Souths tried the robust four-three fit spade slam. At first glance this looks superior to Six Diamonds, but the natural looking line of delaying drawing trumps, and playing ace, king and ruffing a third diamond this with dummy's nine of trumps, saw East overruff with the ten, and the defence score a late heart trick. A somewhat cruel down one.

To buy my new Deal-a-Day 2007 Bridge calendar, visit www.calendarfirst.co.uk; alternatively call 0870-428-4847.

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The 2006 Lederer Memorial Trophy, Britain's strongest invitational event, was won by Zia's All Stars, for the sixth time in nine years. Although your columnist was an All Star for the first five of those victories, this year, as part of the "A Team", I had to settle for 4th place (out of eight). Congratulations to Zia Mahmood, Thomas Bessis, Sabine Auken, and Daniela Von Arnim.

The award for the Best Bid Hand went to second place finishers, England London's David Price (South) and Colin Simpson (North) were the only pair to reach slam - today's featured deal.

Study the North-South cards, and you may argue that it is a slam on a finesse (for the king of clubs). Is it really worthy of the prize?

I think it is, for two reasons:

(A). On any other lead but a diamond, the slam is certain to make, even with the king of clubs offside, as the defence have not set up their second-round diamond winner.

(B). North-South's refreshingly simple, give-away-nothing auction left West completely in the dark as to what to lead.

In the event, West was dealt a diamond sequence (but he could have held a heart sequence), so, on his king of diamonds lead, the slam did prove to be a 50% proposition. Indeed on the diamond lead you would wish to be in Seven Spades rather than Six (you will make 11 or 13 tricks depending on the position of the king of clubs).

All was well. Declarer won the ace of diamonds, cashed the king

Dealer: South Vulnerability: N-S

Teams ♠ H
 ♠ A432
 ♠ A76
 ♠ AQ842

♠ 954 N ♠ 103
 ♠ 10875 W E ♠ K096
 ♠ KQJ92 ♠ 843
 ♠ K S ♠ 7653

♠ AQJ8762
 ♠ J
 ♠ 106
 ♠ J109

S(Price)	W	N(Simpson)	E
3♠	Pass	5♠(1)	Pass
6♠(2)			

(1) General slam invite. North's singleton king of spades is clearly gold dust; he has aces in each side-suit, and a robust five-card suit. Facing a vulnerable-against-not-prompt, presumably sound, this was very well judged. Every other North, at seven of them, simply raised 3♠ to 4♠.

(2) Good trumps and a near one-level opener, so South can hardly refuse the slam invite.

Contract: 6♠ Opening Lead: ♠K

of trumps, cashed the ace of hearts, ruffed a heart, drew the remaining trumps, then, with fingers firmly crossed, led the jack of clubs.

West covered with the king of clubs (perhaps), and declarer breathed a sigh of relief. He won the ace, and could run clubs, discarding his losing diamond. 13 tricks, slam made plus one, and by winning the award, a bottle of champagne to both players.

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