

The Intrafinesse

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One of the most intriguing aspects of bridge is that the best way to play a suit can change based on the bidding and play. Handling these situations requires additional card play tools, one of the most elegant being the intrafinesse. The basic idea of this play is that you take a first-round finesse of a spot card to set up a squashing play on the next round.

Deal 1		Deal 2		Deal 3	
South	North	South	North	South	North
♠ Axx	♠ Q98	♠ A76xx	♠ Q98	♠ AK62	♠ 973
♥ Axx	♥ xxx	♥ xx	♥ xxxx	♥ -	♥ 9762
♦ AKx	♦ xxx	♦ AKX	♦ Qxx	♦ AQJ9742	♦ KT86
♣ xxxx	♣ AKQJ	♣ Qxx	♣ AKx	♣ A8	♣ 92

Here's an example. In deal 1, you declare 3NT after East opens 1♠ and LHO leads a ♦. You need 2♣ tricks for your contract and the bidding marks the King, with length, in RHO's hand. You can make the contract if LHO has the doubleton ♠T or ♠J. Play a ♠ towards dummy's 9 (the intrafinesse) and then run the ♠Q, squashing a doubleton T or J in LHO.

In most cases the intrafinesse is not the only way to play a suit. This suggests that you need clues to determine the best line of play. In hand 2, you declare 4♠ after RHO opens a 12-14 1NT. LHO leads the ♥Q, and RHO overtakes with the K and cashes the ♥A, then switches to a low ♦. The bidding marks the ♠K on your right, meaning you have two possible plays in the ♠ suit. You can play ♠A and duck a ♠ (gaining when RHO has a doubleton), or you can play a ♠ to the 9, an intrafinesse (gaining when LHO has a doubleton T or J). The key clue is RHO's play in ♥, suggesting a doubleton and therefore implying RHO has at least 3♠ for the 1NT opening. After ruffing a ♥ to verify RHO started with a doubleton, the intrafinesse in ♠ is the clear best play.

The intrafinesse is a rare play, but when it appears it can be very beautiful. Hand 3 is a famous example from world champion Geir Helgemo. Declaring 6♦ on a heart lead, the hand hinges on taking three ♠ tricks to discard a ♣ from dummy. After drawing trumps, Helgemo played a ♠ to the 7, an intrafinesse against the doubleton 8! When RHO was dealt ♠QJT5 and LHO ♠84, a subsequent finesse in spades established the last ♠ for a ♣ discard, making 6.