

## **TRAVIS-T(ip) #11**

by Barbara Travis

### **TRY NOT TO TAKE WILD GUESSES – DEFER DECISIONS UNTIL YOU KNOW MORE**

If the outcome of the hand involves guessing a suit or finesse correctly, try to defer that guess/decision until you know more about the hand. Something may happen that converts a guess into a certainty.

Imagine you are playing the following hands in 7NT:

<b>AKQ</b>	<b>J109</b>
<b>J109</b>	<b>AKQ</b>
<b>AKQ</b>	<b>J109</b>
<b>AJ96</b>	<b>K1087</b>

You have 38 HCP but the hands are mirrored shapes and you are missing the CQ. Rather than guessing which way to take the club finesse, it may be better to lead out the other suits first and see if you can discover more about the opponents' hands.

Focus on one suit at a time, so you can work out who has what. Let's say the S8 is led, then you cash 3 rounds of spades. North discards on the third spade. I tend to count the hand where I know about more cards, so at this point I would think, "South started with 5 spades" (3-2-3 + South). Now you lead 3 rounds of hearts, and North discards on the third heart. So South started with 5 hearts too. You know 10 of South's cards. It's now time to complete your information-gathering by leading the diamonds. South discards on the third diamond, so now you know South's complete hand shape: 5 spades + 5 hearts + 2 diamonds, and therefore 1 club.

You no longer have a problem with the club suit. South has 1 club, North has 4 clubs. You cash the CA first to find out what club South held. Assuming it is a small club, you now finesse North's CQ. Make sure you lead the CJ or C9 so you can remain in the West hand to repeat the finesse as necessary, and you have 13 tricks.

Here's another hand:

<b>KJxx</b>	<b>AQxxxx</b>
<b>Axx</b>	<b>xx</b>
<b>KJx</b>	<b>xx</b>
<b>xxx</b>	<b>KQJ</b>

  

1H	Pass	2H	2S
Pass	4S	All Pass	

South leads the HK against your 4S (East). You have 1 heart loser, 1 club loser and need to 'guess' the diamond suit (who has the DA and who has the DQ). How should you pick the diamonds? The best approach is not to guess at all! Find out more about the hand instead.

Draw trumps and lead clubs, losing to the CA. Since you have 24 HCP and NS have 16 HCP but have opened and raised, this should help you 'know' who holds the DA. Suppose that North turns up with the CA. Now you know that South must hold the DA because if North held both Aces, then South opened 1H with 8 HCP. This means that you lead a diamond to the King.

On the other hand, if South wins the CA, then what did North have for the raise to 2H? They won't raise to 2H with just the HJ and DQ, so surely they hold the DA – and you have to hope that South holds the DQ. In this instance you would lead a diamond to the Jack.

One interesting thing, though, is that you should NOT duck the HK at trick 1. If you do so, South might switch to a small diamond at trick 2 before you have the information you need for the diamond guess.

Finding out about the defenders' distribution or their points can be a useful guide in terms of how to play a hand. You can also determine relevant information about the opponents' hands should they have passed before the opening bid (ie fewer than 12 HCP for opening the bidding) or if they have passed their partner's opening bid (ie fewer than 6 HCP). When people make two-suited bids, showing a 5-5 shape, you know a lot about their hands before the play event starts.

The opening lead may also help with the placement of missing honour cards – for example if someone leads a Jack you can place their partner with the Queen.

Be aware of all these useful guides when you are playing a hand, so that you can minimise your guesswork and maximise your trick-taking potential.