

A RUFFING FINESSE TO THE RESCUE

West is the dealer and passes. Your partner opens 1♣ and righty overcalls 2♥. It's up to you with this unusual hand:

S	South
♠	KQJ96532
♥	
♦	10974
♣	6

You've only got 6 HCP, but you have so much more. You start with an 8 card spade suit. You also have a void in your opponent's suit. You would have opened 4♠ in first position with this hand, and there is no reason you shouldn't bid 4♠ now. You have a 5 Losing Trick Count, and partner promised 2 defensive tricks when he opened. Also, the suit quality of your spades is 11. This is the number of cards in the suit plus the number of honors in the suit. A suit quality of 10 or more means your suit is self sufficient and can serve as the trump suit even without help from partner.

Your 4♠ response is met with a push to 5♥ by West. This is passed around to you again. You have a choice of just passing and hoping they don't make it; doubling and increasing their penalty if they are set; or bidding on to 5♠. Usually, it is right to leave the 5-level to the opponents, but here you have no defense against 5♥. They probably have a singleton or void in spades; they have a heart suit that probably resembles your spades suit; and since they could easily have either a void in diamonds or lots of values in diamonds.

I would bid on to 5♠ which is passed out, and becomes the final contract.

West leads the ♦A and you see this dummy. Plan your play.

N	North
♠	A8
♥	K4
♦	J2
♣	AQ109852

West leads ♦A

S	South
♠	KQJ96532
♥	
♦	10974
♣	6

You should be very pleased with the hand dummy lays down. He has made your trump suit bullet proof. He also provides two trump to ruff two losing diamonds in your hand, once West takes his two top diamonds. Those two diamonds are your only losers, so what could go wrong?

What goes wrong is that after West wins his ♦A, he switches to a spade. He has visualized how you are going to play, and instead of taking his ♦K, he wipes out one of the two ruffs you were planning on taking. Before you can ruff even one diamond, you must lose another to the ♦K. Then they can lead another spade and you have no diamond ruffs. Now you have to think of another way of taking 11 tricks.

The title of the piece should give you a clue. The answer is a ruffing finesse of partner's clubs. A ruffing finesse is a technique where the missing honor (the ♣K in this case) is sitting just behind the honor that are led (the ♣Q10). Of course success in this case will depend on the ♣K being in East, and since you don't have the ♣J, it also requires the ♣J falling one one of the first two tricks.

The plan for the operation is to win the spade lead in your hand, keeping the dummy's spade entry for later. Now lead a club up the ♣A, eschewing the finesse. Both opponents will play low. Now lead the ♣Q and pray. If East plays the ♣K, you will ruff high; if he plays low you will discard a diamond. He does play his king, you ruff with an honor card and West drops the ♣J! The bridge gods have blessed you. Now you can get back to the dummy with your ♣A, while pulling the last trump and leaving you with the opportunity to discard all the remainig diamons in your hand on dummy's good clubs.

Although West made a smart move by not taking his ♦AK and letting you trump your two losing diamonds, he has given you the ability to make an overtrick using a technique called the ruffing finesse.

This is the entire deal:

D 4	N North	W N E S
	♠ A8 ♥ K4 ♦ J2 ♣ AQ109852	P 1♣ 2♥ 4♠ 5♥ P P 5♠ P P P
W West		E East
♠ 74 ♥ 108532 ♦ AKQ5 ♣ J3		♠ 10 ♥ AQJ976 ♦ 863 ♣ K74
	S South	
	♠ KQJ96532 ♥ 10974 ♣ 6	5♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0

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

<http://tinyurl.com/yc64jper>, 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.

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