

Know your suit combinations by Brian Senior

 csbnews.org/know-your-suit-combinations-by-brian-senior/

Ana Roth

18/07/2016



Do you know the correct way to play 1098765 opposite a small singleton, or A10987 opposite Q432, or indeed a whole host of other everyday suit combinations? If you take your bridge at all seriously then you should. Yet it is surprising how often one sees even quite highly regarded players going wrong. Why is this? Suit combinations are one area of the game which you definitely can improve on with the aid of books. I think the problem is that they are basically boring. We would all much rather read about how to play a complex squeeze or bring off some daring psychological coup. Yet such opportunities are rare, while basic technique crops up time after time, every time we play.

Before I go any further, a word of warning. In this article I shall be discussing the play of suits in isolation, and assuming you to have all the entries you require to play the suit to the best advantage. In real life this will not always be the case, and you will have to do the best you can with what is available. Also, the overall hand may make it imperative to keep a particular defender out of the lead. If so you must modify your strategy accordingly. Again, the bidding may suggest that a particular defender is likely to have the greater length in a suit, or the majority of the high cards. This can alter the odds quite substantially. Nonetheless, the study of suit combinations, providing it is combined with common sense, can be extremely rewarding.

Let us look at a few examples and see not only what is correct but also why it is correct. Later I shall present you with a quiz on other combinations. I shall give the solutions, but leave you to work out the reasons. After all, why should I do all the work?

(A) KJ98765 opposite 2 For 5 tricks

The short answer is that you should lead low to the king, assuming no other clues. Now, why? Holding a singleton, we have only one chance. If West plays an honour we are certain of losing at most 2 tricks. If the suit is 5-0, we have no chance so can forget about the possibility. When they are 3-2 it is a complete guess. Think about it. If we guess wrong the first time we can some times recover by guessing correctly which remaining honour is now bare

and leading accordingly the second time.

So the only time our play is not just a guess is when the suit breaks 4-1 with West having the length.

Consider the possible singletons. East has a small card-since we can never finesse again we are doomed to lose 3 tricks. East has bare 10- playing the king or jack drops it and we lose 2 tricks, playing the 9 loses 3 tricks. East has bare queen – the king drops it and we lose 2 tricks, anything else loses 3 tricks. East has bare ace – nothing works, even if we play low – dropping the ace – we must still lose 2 more tricks.

So the king NEVER loses but sometimes gains on 4-1 breaks, and is just as likely to be the right guess as any other on the 3-2 breaks, so is the right play.

(B) A10987 opposite Q432 For 4 trick

With nine cards it is often correct to take two finesses, but not here. The right play is ace and another. Either play works if West has a doubleton honour or either player has a singleton honour. Two finesses are needed when West has KJx or KJxx. but ace and another is necessary if East has either holding. So long as you lead low rather than the queen for the first finesse you could combine these a little as when East has KJxx West will show out and you can revert to ace and another. So far everything is equal, agreed? Ace and another is better- because it restricts you to one loser when East has KJ doubleton. while two finesses loses to both honours.

This is a good example of a play which could be affected by the bidding!. Suppose East had opened three of another suit. Since he would be marked with much greater length than West in that suit, he would be less likely to have the greater length in the suit we are interested in. Now taking two finesses becomes much more attractive, as KJx or KJxx with West is much more likely than with East.

Similarly, if West had opened a strong NT it would be reasonable to play him for at least one honour and take 2 finesses. East could still have KJ bare, but KJx and KJxx are now impossible.

(C) K432 opposite Q105 For 3 tricks.

The best shot is to lead low intending to finesse the 10 on the first round. If East plays the jack you cover with the queen and cross back to hand to lead low towards the 10.

This must be the most commonly misplayed combination of all. Everyone is afraid of losing to the bare jack, so they insist on leading first to the king and only then to the 10.

What do you need to make 3 tricks? East could have Jxx- either line works, J or Jx is no use as West has A89x(x). He could have AJ. – either line works. Or he could have AJ doubleton. This is where the recommended play gains. Play low = to the king and it loses to the ace. West's 9 wins the fourth round. Lead up to the Q10x twice and you win all three of your honours – success!

(D) A01032 opposite 654 For 4 tricks

At the table a lot of people would finesse the 10 then the queen. but actually they should reverse this. i.e. finesse the queen first then cross back to the South hand and lead towards the 10, whether or not the queen holds.

Queen holds. Finessing the 10 first is right if you need all 5 tricks. but when does it gain?- when KJx are onside. When its KJxx you still lose one. 3-2 breaks with at least one honour onside are O.K. on either line, as is KJxx onside. Both lose to bare king offside, but finessing the 10 first also loses to bare jack offside-finessing the queen picks that one up and so is better.

How about cashing the ace first? That gains against bare king, bare Jack, or doubleton KJ offside. The problem is when there is honour to three onside, as you have a guess on the second round. This is so much more likely than

the bare honours that this is the worst of the three options.

(E) AJ32 opposite K954 For 4 tricks.

This is a standard 'book' suit combination. The less experienced player cashes the king then finesses the jack. The player who knows this combination finesses the Jack Immediately instead. Both succeed when West has Qx or Qxxx. but finessing immediately also picks up West's bare queen and East's 10xxx. The bare queen with East is irrelevant. O.K., you go one more down by finessing into it, but this never costs the contract. If East has bare queen you cannot make four tricks, can you?

Before we move on to the quiz section, just two more points. The number of tricks you are aiming for can totally alter the correct line of play, and the addition of useful spot cards can also change the odds. So while knowing your combinations is very important, never forget to also play bridge.

PROBLEMS

- (1) AKQ10x opposite x For 5 tricks
- (2) AKQ109 opposite x For 5 tricks
- (3) AKxxx opposite Q10 For 5 tricks
- 4} AJxx opposite K9xx For 3 tricks
- (5) AQ9x opposite Jx For 3 tricks
- (6) A1098 opposite Qxxx For 3 tricks
- (7) Kxxx opposite Q10x For 2 tricks
- (8) KJ10xxxx opposite x For 6 tricks
- (9) KJ10xxxx opposite x For 5 tricks
- (10) AKJ10xxx opposite xx For 6 tricks

SOLUTIONS

⇓

⇓

⇓

⇓

⇓

⇓

⇓



(1) AKQ10x opposite x For 5 tricks

The best hope is to finesse the 10.

(2) AKQ109 opposite x For 5 tricks

Adding the 9 completely changes the correct line. The difference in the odds is not huge, but you should now play the suit from the top.

(3) AKxxx opposite Q10 For 5 tricks

Finesse the 10. This is much better than playing from the top.

(4) AJxx opposite K9xx For 3 tricks

Cash the ace then low to the 9, unless the next hand plays an honour or shows out. This is a standard safety play and is a sure thing.

(5) AQ9x opposite Jx For 3 tricks

Lead low to the jack, and whether or not it holds finesse the 9 next.

(6) A1098 opposite Qxxx For 3 tricks

Take two finesses, leading low first rather than the queen so you can change tack if the next hand shows out. Note the difference losing the ninth card makes.

(7) Kxxx opposite Q10x For 2 tricks

Here, the number of tricks required affects the play. For two tricks the correct line is to lead low to the queen, and whether it wins or not lead low to the 10 next.

(8) KJ10xxxx opposite x For 6 tricks

The only chance is queen doubleton onside, so lead low to the jack.

(9) KJ10xxxx opposite x For 5 tricks

Now that you can afford two losers the correct play is low to the king.

(10) AKJ10xxx opposite xx For 6 tricks

Finesse twice. Do not cash the ace first.

If you get them all correct, well done. If not, see if you can work out why the recommended line is correct. If you can do it here you should be able to use the same technique to help you solve problems in actual play – and that could be very useful, don't you agree?

Diseño: Ezena