

**Half a Chance
by Roger Lord**

Dealer: South

Vul: None

	North	
	♠ 84	
	♥ J64	
	♦ A10763	
	♣ K83	
West		East
♠ KQ9		♠ AJ102
♥ 85		♥ 932
♦ J984		♦ Q2
♣ 9654		♣ Q1072
	South	
	♠ 7653	
	♥ AKQ107	
	♦ K5	
	♣ AJ	

South	West	North	East
1 Heart	Pass	2 Hearts	Pass
2 Spades	Pass	4 Hearts	All Pass

Contract: Four Hearts

Opening Lead: Heart Five

Without looking at the East-West cards, try to figure how declarer should handle four hearts with an opening trump lead.

When North raised partner's one heart opening to two hearts, South judged his hand to be worth a game invitation. South's two spade rebid was not an attempt to switch trump suits. Rather, it asked North to reevaluate his hand in light of his holding in spades. North's hand was nearly maximum, with the only flaw being the lack of a fourth trump. Therefore, North accepted the invitation by jumping to four hearts.

West's excellent trump lead began cutting dummy's ruffing power. Declarer let the heart ride to his hand, and he started spades. West's nine held, and he continued a trump, won in the South hand. On South's next spade play, West followed with the queen, and East carefully overtook it with his ace in order to remove dummy's last trump, the jack.

For the moment, declarer could count just nine tricks: five hearts, the ace-king of diamonds, and the ace-king of clubs. He could try ruffing out diamonds (playing the king-ace of diamonds and ruffing the third in the hope of setting up the fourth and fifth diamonds), but with only the club king as an outside entry, that play would require a 3-3 diamond break. Alternatively, he could finesse the jack of clubs (by leading low from dummy toward the club ace-jack and playing the jack if the queen did not appear). Then, after unblocking the club ace, he could return to dummy's diamond ace and deposit a losing spade on the club king.

Which of these plays is better? Unless the opponents somehow tip you off, there is a clear mathematical superiority for the finesse. This is true because of the original odds that the finesse of the club jack will work—50%, as opposed to the odds that the diamond suit will break 3-3—only 35.5%. If you have any questions, you are welcome to inquire.