

Safety Finesse by Roger Lord

Dealer: South
Vul: East-West

	North	
	♠ K92	
	♥ AJ4	
	♦ A964	
	♣ 863	
West		East
♠ Q104		♠ J7653
♥ Q83		♥ K107652
♦ KJ8		♦ ---
♣ J942		♣ 107
	South	
	♠ A8	
	♥ 9	
	♦ Q107532	
	♣ AKQ5	

For today's deal, you are South. Cover the East-West cards, and either bid for both North and South or find a partner to bid North's hand. South is the dealer.

The optimum contract is six diamonds. West leads the heart three. To make the hand, all you need to do is get rid of the outstanding trumps without losing two trump tricks, take the spade A-K and the club A-K-Q, and use dummy's trump to ruff your fourth club.

Not so fast! That is, if you were in a hurry to lay down the ace of diamonds and another diamond, making seven if the singleton diamond king drops or making six if the suit otherwise breaks 2-1. You would also succeed against all three diamonds placed in the East hand, by leading toward the queen on the second play of the suit. But what if it is West who holds the three trumps? Now you will lose two tricks and go down in the well-bid slam.

To guarantee not to lose two trump tricks, you may simply take the heart ace and lead a diamond toward the queen, playing the queen unless East jumps in with the king. Regardless of what happens on this trick, you will see what to do next--no harm can come to you, and the suit can be picked up, however it breaks, with only one loser. Think about it.

If you want to take an additional edge, particularly in a matchpoint game (where an overtrick is important), you can ruff a heart at trick two to get to your hand and lead a diamond toward the table, finessing the nine if the eight appears on your left. Not only will this work for one loser, it also will enable you to capture the king when it is a singleton with West, because you can see the king before you follow—thus, you will win all the tricks with no risk.

The odds of a 2-1 break (before any cards are played) are 78%. That makes the odds of a 3-0 break 22%, and the odds of specifically one defender holding three diamonds 11%, or one out of nine trials per occurrence. You should root for it to happen sooner, as you will be a winner.

Here was the bidding at one table (just for interest, not for a lesson):

South	West	North	East
1 Diamond	Pass	2 Diamonds*	Pass
2 Spades	Pass	3 Hearts	Pass
4 Hearts**	Double	5 Clubs***	Pass
6 Diamonds	All Pass		

*Inverted minor raise, forcing to 2 notrump or higher

**Kickback keycard asking bid, diamonds as trumps

***response showing two keycards, no trump queen