

We often get into discussions at CHAT that require more discussion than we have time for. I have two different topics that we have had cursory discussions on.

First Topic: Eight Ever, Nine Never (EE-NN):

...do we finesse for the queen or play the Ace and King and hope to drop the queen?

- If you have 8 cards in the suit always (Ever) finesse for the Queen.
- If you have 9 cards in the suit, (Never) finesse for the Queen. Instead play for the drop.

Disclaimer: Always and Never, NEVER always mean Always and Never.

There are always exceptions to the rule. I watched the same hand played at two different tables. Declarer had **AKJxx** and Dummy had **T9x** in the trump suit. Both declarers played for the drop of the queen. **Eight Ever** says “always finesse”. Playing the trump suit first was the right plan. But there were no additional clues available. With no additional information, I would have finessed as the rule states.

We discussed this rule at one table and then played the hand over again. BUT, we still didn’t get it right. There is another part to the play of the suit that I hadn’t discussed. We should take the Ace first, then cross to dummy (we had entries) and try the finesse. Don’t let the singleton Queen become a trick for the opponents!

Losing to a singleton Queen is distressing. It can do long term damage. It may lead to negative self-talk which can affect your play on subsequent hands. Continued mistakes diminish your perception of yourself. You get home and you experience malaise: “I don’t want to play bridge anymore!” More distress, indigestion, sleep-deprivation, melancholy, etc... You likely will be paying for some counseling.

All this can be avoided. Follow my prescriptive psychological advice:

“Don’t lose to the singleton Queen!”

Second Topic: Playing in a 4x4 versus a 5x3 suit.

your hand:

♠ KJ7
 ♥ KQT7
 ♦ 875
 ♣ A75

the bidding: (opponents are silent)

(you)	(partner)
1♣	1♠
1NT	3♥
?	

Partner’s bidding promises 5 spades and at least 4 hearts. You can see that you have at least 8 cards in each major. Which one do you want partner to play in?

For these two examples, we are going to assume that neither major breaks 5-0.

1. Choose 5-3 distribution and play in 4♠.

The opening lead is ♦A followed by a switch to ♣T.

You (dummy)	Declarer
♠ KJ7	♠ AQT43
♥ KQT7	♥ AJ43
♦ 875	♦ Q
♣ A75	♣ 862

Take the ♣T with the Ace. Count your tricks. You have 1 club trick, 5 spade tricks and 4 heart tricks. That's 10. Can you get another trick? Greg or Genny probably could, but I am done. Take my **10 tricks** and wait for the electronic description of my bridge play – "AVERAGE". Very Inspiring. Ho Hum. ~~Malaise and melancholy set in...~~ Darn, I already used that.

Note: Trumping your two diamond losers in the long hand (the 5-hand) gains nothing.

2. Choose the 4-4 distribution and play in 4♥.

Again, the opening lead is ♦A followed by a switch to ♣T.

Take the ♣T with the Ace. Now you trump the 7♦ with the 3♥. Lead the 4♥ to the King; trump your last diamond with the J♥. Take the A♥. Low spade to the King. Clear the Trump suit and take the spades. You take 12 tricks. All you lose is the A♦.

I researched 4x4 vs 5x3 a bit. The experts I found all agreed that 4x4 is a better choice than 5x3. Jerry Helms (ASK JERRY in the Bridge Bulletin) had a simple summary:

"Faced with a choice between a 5-3 or 4-4 trump fit, the 4-4 fit is usually superior. Reason: With equally divided trumps, either hand may become the short hand to create extra winners."

Note: You don't have a "long hand" when you have a 4x4 trump fit. Trump is divided evenly. In this example, we turned Declarer's hand into the short hand and trumped for extra tricks.

I cherry-picked my example to illustrate how the 4x4 distribution can lead to additional trump tricks. Not all 4x4s work this well. But it is useful to know this. I hope all this detail has not made your head hurt (something I have heard that a few times).