

Play **Better** Bridge! – The Rule Of Eleven

The Rule Of Eleven works when your partnership plays fourth-best opening leads. Notrump contracts like this one are where the Rule is used, and this hand from a recent game is a great example:

Partner leads the 5♦ against 3NT

Declarer responded 1NT to dummy's opening 1♠ call and was immediately raised to 3NT by opener, indicating a strong hand.

Dummy:
♠ AQ987
♥ AK
♦ 4
♣ KJ852

Your Hand: ♠ 643 ♥ JT64 ♦ T876 ♣ Q6

The Rule Of Eleven tells you that there are a total of six cards in declarer's and your hand above the opening lead of the 5♦ (11 minus 5 is 6), assuming partner's lead is fourth-best from a suit partner hopes to establish. Declarer has two cards higher than the 5♦, since you have four higher. What do you play after declarer calls for the four from dummy?

Answer on next screen....

Finessing The Expert Way

- ♠ The most common play in bridge is declarer leading, from or towards dummy, with options after the first defender plays: the winning card, or a lower-ranked card that might win if the first defender, who already played low, has the card(s) in between. This is called a **finesse** and when one works, we call the missing card(s) **onside**; otherwise, **offside**.
- ♥ Most declarers lead the first card and when the first defender plays low as expected, they think for a bit about ... who knows? Some appear to believe that a psychic vibe will alert them to that rare occurrence where the missing card is offside but can be dropped by playing the top card, usually about a 50-1 shot. Successful players on that strategy should become psychics or stock brokers! Experts on defense see this and await the inevitable bounty...
- ♦ An expert approaches finesses differently: having decided to take a finesse, when the first defender follows low as expected, the expert plays the lower card firmly. If it loses, it will lose at other tables. The key is in the choice to take the finesse. An expert will look first for ways to avoid a simple finesse, or some information about the distribution and where the missing high cards likely are. Such info can turn a 50% finesse into a likely or even certain play.
- ♣ Two-way finesses, for example: ATxx opposite KJxx, are more important, since the choice of which way to finesse will gain a trick if correct. Get some clues by playing other suits first, or maybe even see if you can get the opponents to lead this suit for you!

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West opened 1♠, East responded 1NT, West raised to 3NT. South led the 5♦ and the North player had to decide whether to play the ten or a low diamond. The Rule of Eleven tells North that there are exactly six cards higher than the led 5♦ in the North and East hands. North has four of them, so declarer has two. Playing low may cost if declarer has the 9♦, but is this likely? If

declarer has the 9♦ and a higher honour, partner would lead a different card: from AQJ5 partner would lead the queen, from AKJ5 or AKQ5 partner would lead the king. Declarer **cannot** have the 9♦, so play low! Declarer wins the queen and at some point finesses the jack of clubs, so you're in with the Q♣. If you played the T♦ at trick one, declarer ducks your diamond return, partner must win, and declarer has a diamond stopper. If you **saved** the ten, three diamond tricks!!

<h1>#8</h1>			N NORTH		Mar. 23, 2026			
			♠ 6 4 3	Dealer: N				
			♥ JT 6 4	EW Vul				
D	WEST		♦ T 8 7 6	N	EAST			
♠	AQ 9 8 7		♣ Q 6	♠	K 2			
♥	AK			♥	Q 7 5 2			
♦	4		N SOUTH	♦	K Q 3 2			
♣	K J 8 5 2		♠	JT 5		♣	T 7 4	
		3	♥	9 8 3			1	
17	HCP	10	♦	A J 9 5		6	FRK	1
		10	♣	A 9 3		0		