Playing in a pairs' event against opponents I don't recognize, I hold:

♠A Q 9 7 3 2   ♥J 9   ♦K 6 4   ♣Q 9

With both sides vulnerable, I open **one spade**, and our side reaches **six spades** after this auction:

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
3NT	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♣	Pass	5♦	Pass
6♦	Pass	6♠	All Pass

West leads the jack of hearts and partner puts down a nice hand:

```
        ♠ K J
        ♥ A K 4
        ♦ A J 3
        ♣ K 7 5 3 2
♥J led
        ♠ A Q 9 7 3 2
        ♥ Q 9
        ♦ K 6 4
        ♣ J 9
```

Preliminary analysis:

There are eleven tricks on top, and an easy twelfth if West has either the ace of clubs or the queen of diamonds. If I manage the play right, I can take a club discard and then test clubs first before resorting to the diamond finesse.

I win the queen of hearts and start with the dummy's top spades, but stop short when East discards a diamond on the second round. This leaves West with four spades. With only one entry to my hand, I can't draw trumps before taking the club discard. If I play three rounds of hearts first, West may get a heart ruff if he started with jack-doubleton. I decide to take this

chance. West follows both times, and I get rid of my nine of clubs.

I cross to the king of diamonds and pull West's last two trumps, East throwing a club and another diamond. I have two avenues to twelve tricks at this stage: the double chance of finding *West* with *either* the ace of clubs or the queen of diamonds; or playing *East* for *both* the ace and the queen. I defer the decision by cashing another trump. On this trick, West throws the nine of hearts and East a second club.

West's carding in hearts marks him with an original ♥J1098x. This gives him nine cards in the majors and four in the minors. East alternated her discards: first a diamond, then a club, next a diamond, finally a club. I suspect she began with five diamonds and four clubs, and is down to three and two. My question is whether it is more likely to find a single card— ♣A or ♦Q—among West's four minor-suit cards, or to find *both* among East's nine minor-suit cards. The odds must be very close.

There is another consideration. Many players automatically lead an ace against a slam. I have no history of this particular West, but with an ace and ♠10xxx, many players would lead the ace.

What about East's carding? If she has both the ♣A and the ♦Q and 1=3=5=4 shape, she would have discarded exactly as she did. I decide to try for the more spectacular ending. I play my last trump. West drops his last heart, dummy a low club, and East the eight of clubs. I play a club and eye West's card. He is deliberate but eventually plays low and East wins the now stiff king with her ace. She has only diamonds remaining, and dummy is good.

Partner beams at me, frowns, looks puzzled, and then asks if my play was the right one. All I can say is that on this particular hand, it was.

The full deal:

```
                ♠ K J
                ♥ A K 4
                ♦ A J 3
                ♣ K 7 5 3 2
♠ 10 6 5 4                    ♠ 8
♥ J 10 9 8 3                  ♥ 6 5 2
♦ 10 2                       ♦ Q 9 8 7 5
♣ Q 10                       ♣ A 8 6 4
                ♠ A Q 9 7 3 2
                ♥ Q 9
                ♦ K 6 4
                ♣ J 9
```

Points of Interest:

● Prior to the last trump, this was the position:

```
                ♠ —
                ♥ —
                ♦ A J
                ♣ K 7
♠ —                          ♠ —
♥ 10                         ♥ —
♦ 10                         ♦ Q 9
♣ Q 10                       ♣ A 8
                ♠ 2
                ♥ —
                ♦ 6 4
                ♣ 9
```

On the ♠2, West throws a heart and North and East discard clubs. Perhaps a stouter defense for East might have been to part with the ♦9.

● I am told (subject to correction) that the odds of finding the two key cards with East were 6 out 13, or 46%. This won't win long-term at the casinos, but the additional factor was West's failure to lead the ace of clubs when many players might have done so against a slam with reasonable prospects of a second trick. Sometimes, you need a little luck.