

Companion Card. . .with John Koch

Playing in the finals of a regional compact knockout, I hold:

♠7 6 ♥Q 6 5 ♦K 4 ♣A J 8 7 5 3

Both sides are vulnerable. West, on my left, deals and opens **three hearts**. Partner **doubles**, and East passes. My initial instinct is to try three notrump, but this bid has several drawbacks. One is that West may be ♥AJ109xxx opposite his partner's ♥Kx, when a heart lead will result in a quick -300. Another is that partner may have an ordinary three-level takeout double, something like ♠Axxx ♥x ♦AQxx ♣Kxxx, giving us a splendid play for 6♣. However, these are extremes: West is more likely to have a concentration of good hearts (making three notrump safe), and partner may easily have two hearts (scuttling a six-level contract). Eventually, I bid **three notrump**. Everyone passes. The full auction:

West	North	East	South
3♥	Dbl	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

West leads the ♥K and a quick look at dummy validates our bidding:

	♠ A K 5
	♥ J 4
	♦ A Q 8 6 3
	♣ K 6 4
♥K led	
	♠ 7 6
	♥ Q 6 5
	♦ K 4
	♣ A J 8 7 5 3

Preliminary analysis:

Counting the ♥Q, I have eight tricks and only need a favorable

position in clubs for ten or eleven tricks. West continues the ace and a third heart. East throws two small spades and I have to find a discard from dummy. A diamond may cost a trick, so it is between a spade and a club. The third spade appears to be useless, and the club may allow easier communication with dummy. I begin to call for a spade, and then choke off my call. It is seldom right to discard down to top honors early in the play. As for clubs, I have a ready diamond entry if needed. So I call for the ♣4.

On a club to the king, East follows with the 10, but then surprisingly discards the ♠9 under the ♣A. That is a blow. My easy 11 tricks have shrunk to 8. It is time to take stock. East has 11 cards in spades and diamonds. He has thrown 3 spades. If he began with seven spades and four diamonds, four rounds of diamonds will establish the long diamond. But if East has 5 diamonds, I may need some luck. I play the ♦K and West follows with the 10. Good! On a diamond to dummy's ace, West shows out. This gives me a complete count of the hand:

	♠ A K 5	
	♥ —	
	♦ Q 8 6	
	♣ —	
♠ 8 4		♠ Q J 10
♥ 10 9 8 7		♥ —
♦ —		♦ J 9 7
♣ Q		♣ —
	♠ 7 6	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ J 8 7 5	

I play ace, king and another spade. East wins the ♠Q, and plays the ♦J. I duck, and East must give me the last two tricks with the ♦Q8.

The full deal:

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

Points of Interest:

- In the bidding, it is too much to expect partner to produce four or five specific features. Here partner needed the ♣K, the queen or a fourth club, a singleton heart, the aces of spades and diamonds, *and* something extra. If North-South had been allowed to conduct a leisurely auction to place most of these features, and needed *only* one extra card, it would be reasonable to move toward slam. But as it was, gambling that dummy would come down with perfect cards was asking too much.

- It is always good policy to keep a companion card to your honors in a suit. In this case, the small spade represented the throw-in card—hard to anticipate in the early play but invaluable in the endgame.