

Double Clutch. . .with John Koch

Playing in a pairs' event at the local club against long-time adversaries, I hold as South:

♠ A Q 3 ♥ A 8 7 ♦ 10 2 ♣ Q 9 5 4 2

With no one vulnerable, I open **one club**. West, on my left, preempts **two diamonds**. Partner bids **three diamonds**—limit raise or better. East **doubles**, showing something in diamonds. Since partner did not make a negative double, **three spades** from me must be a notrump try. Partner now jumps to **five clubs**. This ends an auction in which everyone has participated:

South	West	North	East
1♣	2♦	3♦	Dbl
3♠	Pass	5♣	All Pass

West leads the ♦K, and partner announces that he thought three notrump was too much of a gamble:

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

Initial impressions:

I am not sure that I fully agree with his analysis. If I can find the ♣K, I have nine easy tricks in notrump. As it is, I need to find the club king and perhaps two other cards to bring in eleven tricks in clubs. I win the ♦A in the dummy, and finesse the ♠Q successfully. I now put the ♣Q on the table. West reaches for one card, reconsiders, and plays another. What about his “double clutch”?

If West has the ♣K, the appearance of the ♣Q is hardly a surprise. He can have no illusion that covering will establish a trick for partner. Knowing from long experience that West is ethical if sometimes flighty, the only realistic conclusion is that he cannot have the king of clubs. His fumbling must be for another reason; perhaps he and his partner are experimenting with some new trump-signaling system. So I call for the ace and smile inwardly when I see the king from East. Having crossed this hurdle, I regret that we didn't land in

three notrump, which would have resulted in an easy ten tricks. What's next?

I always have the heart finesse but there is no rush to take it. I pull the last trump, cash the ♠A, and exit with a diamond. This is the layout:

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

It doesn't matter who wins the diamond: if West, he can lead a heart to my ace and now a spade endplays East. Alternatively, if East wins, he is immediately endplayed after cashing a spade. The full deal:

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

Points of Interest:

- When an ethical and normally competent player hitches in following suit, it is reasonable to conclude that he has thoughts *other than covering an honor with an honor*. If he has the honor, he can be expected to follow smoothly because he is well-schooled in this common situation.

- Aside from the “table feel,” there is a sound match-point reason to spurn the finesse. With 25 points, everyone will be in game. Those in three notrump will score +400 or +430 if the club finesse is on. By playing for the drop, there is a reasonable chance of scoring game when others are minus. The odds soar if declarer can count West for two clubs.