

Early Concession. . .with John Koch

Playing in a sectional pairs' game with an experienced partner, I hold:

♠ 7 5 ♥ A K 10 4 3 ♦ 10 7 4 ♣ A 9 7

North, on my right, is dealer and opens **one club**. I overcall **one heart**, and South makes a negative **double**. Partner passes and North rebids **two clubs**. I pass and South rebids **two notrump**. North's **three notrump** completes the auction:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	2♥	Dbl
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

Partner leads the ♥8 and this is what I see:

♠ K Q
♥ 9 3
♦ Q 9 8
♣ K Q J 10 8 5

8♥ led

♠ 7 5
♥ A K 10 4 3
♦ 10 7 4
♣ A 9 7

Preliminary analysis:

The bidding, view of dummy, and lead point to two insights: partner has room for only a single high card, and his lead is from a doubleton heart. That leaves declarer with two heart stoppers and there is no future in trying to develop the setting trick in hearts. So I win the first trick with the ♥K.

Declarer is marked with the ♥QJxx. He will also have both top diamonds, or more likely, one high diamond and the ace of spades. The only chance to beat this contract is to find partner with ♠AJxx. I need to shift to the ♠7; partner will have to duck the first spade; and then we can collect our three major suit tricks when declarer knocks out my ♣A. But how likely is it for partner

to have specifically the ♠AJ? My instincts are that the chances are 10% at best.

Their three notrump appears to be a normal contract. It must be better to try to maximize our defensive tricks even if this falls short of beating the contract. The way to do this is by shifting to a diamond. Partner grabs the king and continues diamonds. Declarer wins the return and plays on clubs. What do I do after winning the ace?

Declarer is ready to run five clubs, three spades and two diamonds—ten tricks. It is time to cash the ♥A. For some reason it feels like giving up, but when I check the score later, there are three -660s, seven -630s, and two -600s. I set aside my misgivings about soft defense and record our 10½ match points.

The full deal:

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

Points of Interest:

- In a team game it is almost always right to go for the set, even if improbable. The sacrifice of an IMP is a good exchange for a possible 12 IMPs.

- Even after playing pairs' games for years, most players have not given enough thought to the nature of the scoring. Everyone is aware of the objective of each deal to outscore as many pairs as

possible. But it is hard to rein in one's natural instincts to try to set every contract. The winners of pairs' events consist of a relatively small group of players, and a key reason for their success is that they understand the strategy of the game *and* have disciplined themselves to apply that strategy.

- It is good to have firm agreements when leading partner's suit against notrump. On this hand the defenders were using "attitude" leads but were leading second high from three small. The eight was clearly the highest and therefore had to be a doubleton.

- When declarer makes a limit bid in notrump, it is easy to get a count on the hand. A defender should assign him with 11 points and he will probably never be more than a point off.