## Five or Three?...with John Koch

Playing in a team game against experienced opponents, I hold:

Generally, I subscribe to the accepted view to open clubs with a balanced hand and two four-card minors. Here I draw the line and open **one diamond.** The opponents are silent and we reach **three notrump** in this auction:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

West leads the  $\bullet$ Q, and this is what I see:

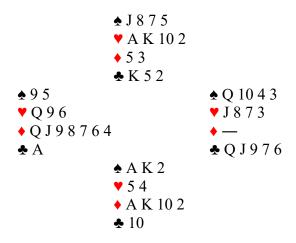
## Initial analysis:

I win the ace as East discards the club seven. The club discard gives a glimpse of the outstanding distribution. East likely started with five or six clubs and length in both majors. Even if East has length in clubs, I need a trick or two from clubs, so I begin with a low club, and I am happy to see West win the ace. West now shifts to the ♥9. I play the ten from dummy, and East wins the jack and returns the three, which goes to West's queen and dummy's ace.

East is almost surely 4=4=0=5, which means that I am never going to take more than one club and two hearts. Therefore, I need three from both spades and diamonds. What is the best way to play spades given the four-two break?

If East has all the key spades, I can't manage three tricks. But if he has only two, I can develop three spade tricks depending on how I start the spades. Since the odds are two to one that West's doubleton is \$\delta 10x\$ or \$\delta 9x\$, I begin by leading the \$\delta J\$ from the dummy. East covers with the queen and I win the ace. On the \$\delta K\$, West obliges by dropping the ten. A small spade to dummy's \$\delta 87\$ develops my third spade trick, and dummy is put back on lead with \$\delta K\$. I cash the spade and the \$\delta K\$, and lead a low diamond from the board and play the \$\delta 2\$ from my hand. West plays the \$\delta 4\$. What happens?

The outcome depends entirely on my preplanning. Did I drop the \$\infty\$5 on the opening lead and retain the \$\infty\$3? Or did I woodenly call for a "low" diamond and retain the \$\infty\$5. If I retained the \$\infty\$5, I win this diamond trick but have to lose a club and a heart to East. If I kept the \$\infty\$3, West's \$\infty\$4 wins and he is endplayed into giving me the last two diamond tricks. This was the full deal:



Points of Interest:

- Declarer was somewhat unlucky to find West with a singleton ace of clubs instead of a singleton queen or jack of clubs, which would have allowed him to develop two extra club tricks.
- The spade suit was a question of probabilities. Once the distribution was established, it was simply a matter of determining that West was more like to have  $$\triangle 10x$  or  $$\triangle 9x$  than the  $$\triangle Qx$ .
- As to diamonds, I have a friend who invariably plays high-low from two small cards in the dummy. When the cards are very small, this deal is a prime example why this practice can sometimes pay huge dividends.