

Labyrinthine Approach. . .with John Koch

Playing a team game against first-rate opponents, I hold as West:

♠J 9 8 7 5 ♥A 2 ♦4 ♣J 9 8 7 5

Partner is dealer and opens **three diamonds**. South and I pass, and North **doubles**. Partner passes, and South bids **three hearts**, which North raises to **four hearts**. The full auction:

West	North	East	South
		3♦	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

I lead my singleton ♦4 and dummy puts down five hearts:

♠ K Q 3
♥ Q 10 7 6 5
♦ 7 5 2
♣ A K

♠J 9 8 7 5
♥A 2
♦4 → 4♦
♣J 9 8 7 5

Dummy plays low, partner the ♦10, and declarer the ♦A.

Initial analysis:

Partner and I have an agreement that we never go four deep as third hand, so I can read partner's ♦10 as showing ♦QJ10 and declarer with the ace and king. Prospects look bleak unless partner has several side assets for his first-chair preempt.

Declarer cashes the ace and king of clubs in dummy, and then plays the ♠K. Partner takes the ♠A and plays the ♦Q, which declarer covers with the king. *What now?*

Prospects look brighter now. We have the ♠A, a diamond ruff, and the ace of trumps. If partner has only six diamonds, his

high diamond represents the fourth trick, but only if he has an entry. The only conceivable entry is the king of trumps. *Can he have it?*

The king of hearts along with the ace of spades and ♦QJ would leave partner with 10 points, certainly a possibility. Perhaps a better question is why declarer is fooling around playing black cards when all he has to do is knock out the ♥A. He then wins the return, pulls the last trump, plays high clubs, returns to his hand with a trump, and discards a diamond on the ♣Q. The answer must be that he doesn't have the king of trumps. So what do I do at this stage, ruff with the low trump or with the ace?

Declarer will have either four or five trumps. If he has five, partner's ♥K will be singleton. I may look foolish if my inferences are flawed, but I ruff with the ♥A, and lead my small trump. Partner wins the ♥K and cashes the ♦J for down one.

The full deal:

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

• Pietro Bernasconi of Switzerland applied the above reasoning to defend exactly as reported.

• On many hands, a defender has to ask why declarer is using a labyrinthine approach instead of a straightforward one. There is usually a rational explanation if the defender takes the time to consider the matter.