

Rational Explanation. . .with John Koch

Playing in a pairs' event against unknown opponents, I hold as South:

♠Q 7 ♥A 9 5 ♦A K 8 2 ♣A K 10 2

I am dealer and begin with **two notrump**. West, on my left, passes, and partner bids three clubs—puppet Stayman. I respond **three notrump**, and partner jumps to **six notrump**. The full auction:

South	West	North	East
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3NT	Pass	6NT	All Pass

West leads the ♦Q and partner tables a 12-count:

♠ K J 9 6
♥ K Q 7 2
♦ 5 4
♣ Q J 3

♦Q led

♠ Q 7
♥ A 9 5
♦ A K 8 2
♣ A K 10 2

Preliminary analysis:

Once the ace of spades is gone, I have eleven top tricks. There are additional chances from a heart break, the ♠10 coming down, or a squeeze.

I win the ♦A, enter dummy with a club, and lead a low spade to my queen, West playing the three and East the eight. Now another spade goes to the king; West plays the ♠4 and East hesitates a half minute before playing the ♠2.

The play so far indicates that West began with three small spades and East with ♠A10xx. If so, East may have done the right thing by ducking the second round. Not only is it too risky for me to try to drop the ♠10 on the third round, but the duck upsets my timing for a squeeze against West in the red suits. There

is still a chance that hearts will break, and West may come under pressure if I finish the club suit. On the clubs, East follows all three rounds, and West once before throwing the ♠5 and, after a momentary pause, the ♦9.

West began with two clubs and apparently three low spades. The diamond spots suggest he is ♦QJ109 although he could be ♦QJ109x. If he has four diamonds, he will also have four hearts. As sometimes happens when the defenders hold up to deny declarer the count for a squeeze, they may no longer be in touch in spades.

I think West is left with only red cards. The question is whether he now has four hearts and two diamonds, or whether he is three and three. If the latter, the hearts are breaking. My inclination is to play him for two diamonds remaining. If he began with ♦QJ1096, for example, he would have had an easy first discard. He certainly would have seen the value of keeping a spade, but he pitched one without much thought. If he threw a small spade in tempo and then hesitated before throwing a deceptive nine from ♦J109x, I have grounds to complain about sharp practice. Instead, he probably can't afford a heart discard, leaving a diamond as his only alternative.

I have given this enough thought. I cash the ♦K and West plays the ♦10. A low diamond gets the ♦J from West and the ♦7 from East. My ♦8 is my twelfth trick.

The full deal:

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

Points of Interest:

- Had East taken his ♠A, there would have been no ambiguity after seven black cards were played.

- When considering the defenders' discards, declarer should ask himself what the defender is thinking about. Normally, there is a rational explanation.

- Declarer's decision was between West holding four hearts and ♦QJ109, or three hearts and ♦QJ109x. Had he thought of it, declarer could have taken out insurance against both possibilities by ducking the ♦8 before cashing the ♦A.