

256. Low Cunning

Playing in a barometer pairs' event in a Chicago-area tournament, we arrive at Table 3 at about the time our number is approaching the top of the leader board. I hold in third position:

♠ A 9 8 3 ♥ K 2 ♦ Q J 7 3 ♣ K J 3

With both sides vulnerable, partner opens **one heart**. East, on my right passes, and I respond **one spade**. West passes and partner rebids **two clubs**. I see nothing better than **three notrump**, which ends the auction:

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

West leads the six of diamonds and this is what I see:

♠ Q J 10
♥ A J 8 7 6
♦ 5
♣ A 10 6 5

♦6 led

♠ A 9 8 3
♥ K 2
♦ Q J 7 3
♣ K J 3

Preliminary evaluation: They have attacked our weak spot which is compounded because there may be a lot of guessing to do. On the opening lead, East wins the king and returns the nine. I cover with the jack. West takes his ace and plays the ten of diamonds to drive out my queen.

The diamonds appear to be five-three and the ten of diamonds, if honest, is suit preference for spades. I play the king and another heart to the ace. West grudgingly produces the ten and queen. I cash the jack and establish the long heart by conceding a trick to East's nine, West discarding the six and deuce of spades. East, as expected, gets out with a spade. I have to decide what is going on in that suit?

West is a colorful local performer who has long been competitive on the national scene. A big man, he has a commanding presence both in size and personality. I could well imagine that his suit-preference and attitude signals may be low cunning,

particularly with the presence of the aces in dummy. If I finesse spades and it loses, I am down two. If I spurn the spade finesse and it is right, I settle for nine tricks when others are taking ten or eleven by routine play. If spades are wrong, even getting to nine tricks will force me to guess the queen of clubs. Should I let this pair talk me out of my finesse?

For all this contrary logic, there is a perfectly sound inference that West holds the spade king. Without an entry, this West would have held off on the ♦J, waiting for his partner to gain the lead to push through another diamond. Instead, by establishing his diamonds, West promised an independent entry, almost surely the king of spades. So I take the ace of spades. What about clubs? Who do I finesse for the queen?

West has shown up with five diamonds and two hearts. He discarded two spades and followed once. Assuming he has the ♠K, that leaves him with two clubs. The odds are two to one that East has the queen, so I lead to the ace of clubs, cash the long heart, and finesse the club. All is well when the finesse works. We have nine tricks and almost a 70% result which springs us into the barometer lead.

The full deal:

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

Points of interest:

- It is always prudent to remember who your opponents are and to consider the possibility of sharp practice at your expense. In my experience they generally are playing it straight. If they aren't, congratulate them afterward for their fine play.

- On the above deal, it was in West's self interest to establish diamonds, clearly suggesting an independent entry, which could only be in spades.