

260. Fickle Combinations

Playing in a pairs' game against not overly imposing opponents, I hold:

♠ A 5 ♥ — ♦ Q 8 6 ♣ Q J 10 9 6 4 3 2

With our side red versus white, East, on my right, opens the bidding with **three hearts**. I am on a nine-count but I also have an eight-card suit with only five losers and a void in the preempt suit. I would be a coward to sit this out, so I overcall **four clubs**. West passes, and partner surprises me by jumping to **six clubs**, ending a short auction:

West	North	East	South
—	—	3♥	4♣
Pass	6♣	All Pass	

West leads the nine of hearts and partner puts down some nice cards:

♠ Q 6 3
♥ Q 8 3 2
♦ A 9 4 2
♣ A K

♥9 led

♠ A 5
♥ —
♦ Q 8 7
♣ Q J 10 9 6 4 3 2

Preliminary evaluation: There are ten tricks on top and the queen of spades should furnish an eleventh, but I will need one more. It appears that East has all the heart honors, which leaves West with both pointed kings. It strikes me that this might be the right time for an intra-finesse in diamonds, playing East—the preemptor—for ♦Jx or ♦10x in diamonds. Frankly, ♦J- or ♦10-singleton would do as well. The odds should favor it as East figures to be short in diamonds. Alternatively, I can extract all West's hearts and play all my clubs, reducing him to five cards in spades and diamonds. If I can guess what he has kept, I can throw him in in one suit and endplay him in the other. Against Zia, I might take my chances on the intra-finesse; here I am going to try the strip endplay.

I lead a club to the board, both following, and ruff a heart high, West playing the ♥4. Another

club to the board extracts West's last trump, and another heart is ruffed, West throwing a spade. I have three clubs left and play them in quick fashion. West discards a spade on each one. West has thrown four spades. This is my view of the hand:

♠ Q 6 3	
♥ —	
♦ A 9	
♣ —	
♠ K x	
♥ —	Immaterial
♦ K x x	
♣ —	
♠ A 5	
♥ —	
♦ Q 8 6	
♣ —	

I lead the ace and another spade. West wins the king, and plays a diamond. I ride this around to my ♦Q and dummy is now good.

The full deal:

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

Points of interest:

- After East's preempt and West ♥9 lead, it was not hard to place East with all the high hearts, leaving West with the pointed kings.

- The next factor was to visualize declarer's eight clubs winning the first eight tricks, reducing West to king-third and king-doubleton in the pointed suits. All that was required was for declarer to guess the king doubleton.

- What about the intra-finesse? It rated to work but why deal with fickle card combinations when you can depend on more predictable discarding habits.

- What about the defense? West should have thrown his $\diamond 6$ at his first opportunity. Then three low spades wouldn't have given the show away.