

224. Slow Tricks

Playing in a team game with an expert partner against capable opponents, I hold:

♠ 10 8 ♥ A 9 8 5 4 2 ♦ A 9 ♣ K 10 2

South, on my right, passes as dealer, and I open **one heart**. North **doubles**, partner passes, and South jumps to **two notrump**. I have nothing more to say, and North bids a timid **three diamonds**. Partner passes, and South reverts to **three notrump**, concluding the auction. The full bidding:

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♥	Dbl	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

The bidding indicates that declarer is well-heeled in hearts and that dummy will be short. Dummy could be 4-5 or even 4-6 in spades and diamonds, so I am going to dismiss those two suits. It is between a conventional heart or a club. I decide to stay conventional and start with the five of hearts. When dummy comes down, this is what I see:

♠ K J 6 3
♥ 6
♦ Q J 8 7 4
♣ A 8 3

♠ 10 8
♥ A 9 8 5 4 2 → ♥5
♦ A 9
♣ K 10 2

On the opening lead, partner plays the jack and declarer wins the king.

Initial evaluation: Dummy is light in high-card strength and declarer is a passed hand, which means that the opponents have landed in a speculative game with a minimal point count. Nevertheless, they have several advantages: declarer is sure to have ♥KQ10x and his initial attack suit, diamonds, will knock out my entry inconveniently. Sure enough, declarer begins with a low diamond to the queen, and a diamond back

to the king and my ace, partner playing the two and five.

My second key decision! Declarer's trick count is up to six—four diamonds, the ♥Q and the ♣A. Assuming he has ♥KQ10x, his hearts are impervious from my side without giving away the suit. My choices are between the black suits. If partner has ace and queen of spades, a spade is right; if he has the queen of clubs, a club is the right choice. Which one?

At these times, it is good to conduct a count of declarer's values. He has shown up with the red kings and I am giving him the queen of hearts for his repeated notrump bids. His jump to two notrump shows at least 11 points, and his initial pass denies more unless he miscounted his hand. The other three points may consist of the queen of spades and jack of clubs, or the queen-jack of clubs. Which is more likely?

Players who bid notrump typically have dispersed values rather than concentrated ones. That would leave declarer with an honor in each black suit. There is an additional factor. Partner and I try to be diligent with our signals in dummy's key suits. Partner played his two lowest diamonds on the two leads of that suit. The two was count; the five had suit preference implications. With ♠AQ he would have played the higher of his two remaining diamonds.

I decide on a club. Because I want a club returned, I lead the ♣2. Declarer plays low from dummy and partner wins the queen. It takes only a moment for him to put another club on the table. I insert the ten and the ace wins in dummy. Partner has the ace of spades, so we have five tricks and the contract is down one.

The full deal:

<p>♠ K J 6 3 ♥ 6 ♦ Q J 8 7 4 ♣ A 8 3</p> <p>♠ 10 8 ♥ A 9 8 5 4 2 ♦ A 9 ♣ K 10 2</p>	<p>♠ A 5 4 2 ♥ J 3 ♦ 10 5 2 ♣ Q 9 7 6</p>
---	--

♠ Q 9 7
 ♥ K Q 10 7
 ♦ K 6 3
 ♣ J 5 4

Points of interest:

- When a player repeatedly insists on notrump, he generally indicates a strong holding in the defender's bid suit.
- Declarer's initial pass and subsequent jump to two notrump allowed a precise count to eleven points.
- The concept of "attack suit" is worth noting. Declarer's source of tricks was diamonds, and the defense was at a disadvantage because West—the safe opponent—had the ace. Exchange West's ♦A and East's ♠A, and a heart on the third trick would have left declarer with no chance.
- When declarer has slow tricks and is methodically knocking out defensive stoppers, the defense often has no time to lose. It has to identify its own source of tricks and pursue those tricks even in the face of risk.
- The suit preference signal on the second round is a staple of expert partnerships. If the partnership is not using Smith echoes, the first round of the suit is devoted to count. The second round is suit preference *if the higher or highest card is played*. The lower or lowest card suggests the lower suit or shows no preference.