

## 335. Deciding Factor

Playing in a club game against experienced opponents, I hold one of my usual hands:

♠ 9 6 3   ♥ J 6 5   ♦ A 10 4 2   ♣ 9 5 4

With the opponents vulnerable, my partner passes as dealer. South, on my right, opens **one club**. I pass, and North responds **one spade**. Partner now comes to life with **two diamonds**. South considers and eventually bids **two notrump**, which is raised to **three notrump**. The full auction:

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

It is my lead. The obvious lead is a diamond. Undoubtedly declarer has only one stopper, which is likely the king. In my younger days, I regularly encountered players bidding notrump with Qxx in our suit, but most players have abandoned that tactic in favor of Kx(x) expecting a sure trick in the suit after the expected lead.

Based on this reasoning, partner should have ♦QJxxxx. We play a Roman-style two diamond opening, so she couldn't bid the suit initially, but she seized a later opportunity. To enter the auction between two live bidders, she must have something on the side, undoubtedly an ace.

The idea of leading a diamond to clear the suit in the hope that partner's entry can be brought into play is flawed. At best it represents a free trick to declarer; at worst it may be her ninth trick.

So I reject the lead of partner's suit and focus on her entry. I discount spades because I think declarer is looking at that suit as a source of tricks. So my choices are between hearts and clubs. Declarer will have some value in hearts for her two notrump bid. Dummy will also have something in hearts, the unbid suit. Dummy will probably have spade and heart values, leaving it to declarer to take care of the minors.

The logical lead is a heart but I think both opponents are comfortable with hearts. My jack of hearts may be a deciding factor. If one opponent has only the king and the other only the queen, they might not be so satisfied to bounce this contract into three notrump.

That leaves clubs. If I am wrong, I may be spectacularly wrong. But my instincts are that a club is the best chance. I lead the nine to direct a diamond return. This is what I see:

♠ A Q J 7 5  
♥ K Q 10 7  
♦ 5  
♣ 10 7 3

♠ 9 6 3  
♥ J 6 5  
♦ A 10 4 2                      → ♣ 9  
♣ 9 5 4

After the club lead, the play goes quickly. Partner wins the ace and returns the queen of diamonds, covered by the king and ace. Partner overtakes the ten of diamonds and quickly cashes four more diamond tricks. The contract is down three.

The full deal:

♠ A Q J 7 5  
♥ K Q 10 7  
♦ 5  
♣ 10 7 3

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

Many players gamble three notrump, particularly at pairs, with flimsy stoppers, hoping to take the first nine tricks. Too many defenders act like sheep when this happens. Better strategy is often to try to find partner's entry and go for the big set.