

336. Double Disaster

Playing online against unknown opponents, I hold:

♠ A 9 7 6 ♥ A 10 7 2 ♦ K 4 ♣ A Q 7

I am the dealer at favorable vulnerability. Partner and I are playing a strong club with a 14/16-point notrump, so I open **one club**. West, on my left, passes, and partner responds **one diamond**, which ostensibly shows fewer than eight points. East bids **one spade**. Our style with notrump shape is to **pass** with length in the opponents' suit. West also passes, and partner now comes alive with **two spades**, which I take as a very good negative or perhaps an "impossible negative" with a 4-4-4-1 distribution and no limit on points. East **doubles**, and I bid **three hearts**. Now I see **four notrump**. With three aces I bid **five diamonds**, and partner jumps to **six hearts**. West completes the auction with a **double**:

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♦	1♠
Pass	Pass	2♠	Dbl
3♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	All Pass	

West leads the four of spades and partner puts down a reasonable hand:

♠ J
♥ K Q 9 6
♦ A 10 8 2
♣ K J 9 3

♠4 led

♠ A 9 7 6
♥ A 10 7 2
♦ K 4
♣ A Q 7

Except for the double, which undoubtedly signifies a bad trump break, this is a reasonable contract. West can't be doubling on anything but trumps. If he has all five, I must plan on three club tricks, two diamonds, a spade, and six trumps. Ruffing diamonds in my hand is risky. It must be better to ruff spades in dummy and rely on a late endplay.

On the opening lead, East plays the ♠K which I win with the ace. I can ruff a spade at trick two, but it would be embarrassing if West is allowed to take a damaging discard. Instead I lead a club to the jack and test trumps by cashing the king. As expected, East shows out throwing a low diamond. I now hold me breath and cash two more rounds of clubs. Both follow.

That means that even if West has a singleton spade, he will have at least four diamonds and my contract should be secure. I ruff a low spade as West follows. Now the ace and king of diamonds, and again both follow.

I can claim at this point but the claim will never go unchallenged. I ruff a spade with the nine of hearts, and cash the queen. I am down to ♥A10 and a small spade in my hand. I lead a club and throw the spade. West, who has ♥Jxx, must ruff and exit with a heart into my tenace. The rest are mine.

The full deal:

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

West's double was a disaster. It supplied declarer with clues in the play and increased the ultimate IMP loss.

When declarer suspects a bad trump break, he should first count his side-suit tricks and then add the requisite number of trump tricks. Because the ♠4 might have been a singleton, declarer's first step was to check trumps and then to take his side tricks. Only when he knew his side tricks were secure did he take the first spade ruff.