

338. Taking Care of Partner

Playing in the semi-finals of a national team event against one of the top pairs in the country, I hold sitting East:

♠ K 10 7 6 ♥ Q 5 4 ♦ 10 7 6 ♣ Q J 10

With no one vulnerable, our side remains silent and the opponents reach **three notrump** after this auction:

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

Partner leads the four of diamonds and this is what I see:

♠ Q J 9 5 2
♥ A 10 6
♦ 9 3 2
♣ 8 6

♦4 led

♠ K 10 7 6
♥ Q 5 4
♦ 10 7 6
♣ Q J 10

The cards are not particularly well-positioned for declarer so we should have some chances. On this first trick, I play the ten and declarer wins the ace. A low spade is now led to the jack and my king, partner contributing the eight. It seems automatic to return a diamond at this point, but perhaps an inventory of the hand might be in order.

Declarer's jump shows 18-19 points. Surely he has the ♦AK (or he would have held up), and likely the ♣AK and ♠A. He might have the ♥K instead of the ♣K with or without the ♥J. Counting tricks, declarer has three spades, two diamonds and two clubs, and a heart. His ninth may come from hearts or clubs; it may depend on whether he has the ♥9 or even ♣9.

One thing is sure: partner will not have a quick entry for his fourth diamond. Therefore, if we are going to beat this contract, we have to plan on two spades and a trick in each of the other suits. We also may have timing problems—can we get our fifth trick before declarer wins his ninth? Our spade

and heart tricks will come to us naturally because declarer has to give us tricks in order to establish his own tricks. But that will not be the case in diamonds and clubs.

Assuming declarer started with ♦AKx, he will have to hold up the second round of diamonds (or partner will get two diamonds). If declarer holds up, partner will win his diamond and have to shift gears by attacking clubs. Can I expect him to do that? That shift may be tough knowing that I will need *three* club honors for it to be successful.

Instead of relying on partner, I take the initiative to get the club attack going by leading the queen. Declarer wins his ace, and continues with the ace, queen and a fourth round of spades to my ten.

I shift gears again, returning the ♦7. Declarer ducks and partner wins the jack. Partner takes forever but eventually reverts to clubs and my ten is won by declarer's king. I hold my breath hoping declarer did not start with ♣AK9x. No, the jack of hearts is finessed to my queen and I cash a club for the setting trick.

The full deal:

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

Declarer must give up the lead three times, which is just enough for the defense to establish its fifth trick, but only if the defenders lead diamonds and clubs twice apiece. East must recognize that it will be virtually impossible for partner to play him for three club honors. He makes it easy for partner by leading clubs himself. After he reverts to diamonds on his next turn and declarer holds up, West can find his way to return a club to establish the defense's fifth trick.

