

### 343. Steppingstone III

Playing against expert opponents in a pairs' event, I hold:

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

With no one vulnerable, West on my left deals and opens **three clubs**. Partner passes as does East. I have two choices, either three hearts or three notrump. A good argument can be made for three notrump because of my club stoppers and the lack of assurance that partner can support hearts. On the other hand, this is pairs and if partner does have a little heart support I want to play with field, so I try **three hearts**. West passes and partner raises to **four hearts**, ending the auction. The complete bidding:

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

West leads the nine of diamonds and partner puts down a somewhat disappointing dummy:

♠ A Q 9 4 3  
♥ 7 4 3  
♦ Q 5 3  
♣ Q 4

♦9 led

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

It appears that diamonds are stacked on my right. I have a diamond, club, and one or more trump losers. I can be reasonably confident that the trump ace is on my right, so my heart honors are suitably placed. If West has seven clubs—i.e. an old-fashioned preempt—I have additional chances. Let me follow up on that thought: seven clubs, two diamonds, two trumps and two spades. If trumps are less friendly, say a singleton with West, spades will be more so—three-three.

It is incumbent for me to lead through East's trumps, but if the suit is breaking four-one, it may be useful to delay the lead until later, particularly, as here, where I may have only one entry to dummy.

It is possible that West has a singleton trump honor, so I decide to lead the king of hearts from hand at the second trick. West indeed obliges by playing the ten as East wins the ace.

East thinks a moment and exits with a low spade. I win the king, and cross to dummy with the ♠A. The thought is enticing to play another high spade, throwing my losing diamond. But it would be embarrassing to have this ruffed by West.

I call for the seven of hearts. East covers with the eight. If West started with ♥J10, it is right to play the queen. But that is contraindicated for several reasons: jack-ten doubleton of hearts is against the odds; West's preempt is more attractive with 3=1=2=7 distribution; but mostly, why did East cover with the ♥8 from ♥85? He is more likely to have done so from ♥J85, when he would not want to leave the lead in dummy.

I insert the ♥9 and West discards a club. This is encouraging. Although I have no entry to dummy, I can rely on East to supply my omission. I cash the ♥K. East thinks momentarily before following small. No doubt he considered unblocking.

I follow with a fourth round. East wins the jack. He is left with a spade and ♦KJ10xx. His choices are to take the ♦K and then to lead to dummy's four winners (for four club pitches); or to lead a spade to dummy. The diamond loser goes away, and my tenth trick comes from clubs.

East eventually cashes his ♦K and I have ten tricks. The full deal:

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

The key play was the ♥K from hand at the second trick. Declarer recognized that with only one dummy entry he must look for substitutes. The high honor from hand was one substitute and using East as a steppingstone served as a second substitute.

