

353. License to Bid

Playing online against an expert pair playing a strong club system, I am South:

♠ 9 5 3 ♥ Q J 10 8 4 2 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ 9

With both sides vulnerable, East, on my right, opens **one diamond**, which is alerted as possibly short. There may be some advantages to a preemptive jump in hearts, but I content myself with **one heart**. West **doubles**, and partner bids **two diamonds**, a cuebid, showing a limit raise or better in hearts. East bids **three clubs**, and I compete to **three hearts**. West bids **four clubs**, and partner pushes to **four heart**, ending the auction:

West	North	East	South
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Dbl	2♦	3♣	3♥
4♣	4♥	All Pass	

West leads the king of clubs and partner's hand has some unfortunate duplication:

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

It appears I have three minor-suit losers and will need both finesses in the major suits. The king of clubs wins and West shifts to the two of diamonds, and I win East's jack with the ace. On the queen of hearts, West covers with the king as East follows, and I return to hand with a high heart, with East discarding a club.

It is time to take stock. West's negative double implies four spades, and he has produced two hearts. The two of diamonds looks like a singleton, which would leave him with six clubs. That would be compatible with East's diamond opening and club rebid. It is also

consistent with East's one diamond opening: with six clubs he may have preferred to start with two clubs.

This means that the spade finesse is two-to-one in favor. Offsetting this, a count of East's minor-suit points totals 10 or 11. The queen of spades would give him a more respectable opening bid, but I doubt if that matters: most strong-club bidders think they have a license to bid with any marginal holding.

It occurs to me that if spades are divided four-two, it doesn't matter who has the queen of spades. If East has it, it will drop; if West has it, I can cash the ace and king, return to hand with a heart, and lead toward the jack. Assuming West has a singleton diamond, I will be safe. This seems the reasonable alternative. On the ace and king of spades, sure enough, East plays the queen, giving me ten tricks.

The full deal:

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

A rudimentary knowledge of the opponents' systemic understandings is always helpful. Most big-club players open two clubs with a limited hand and six clubs. With five-five or four-five in the minors, it is common to open a diamond and rebid clubs. Combined with the switch to the two of diamonds, it was fairly clear that East was five-five.

In that case, the defenders were out of touch so long as East was not allowed an entry with the spade queen.