

## 354. Italian Magic

Playing in the quarterfinals of a major team event, I hold one of my usual hands:

♠ Q 8 7   ♥ A 10 6   ♦ 10 7 4 3   ♣ 8 6 5

Red versus white, I pass as dealer, and West, on my left, opens **one heart**. Partner **doubles**, and East, on my right, bids **one spade**. In our methods, I am just short of a free bid, so I pass, and West rebids **two diamonds**. Partner now comes in with **three clubs**. When East passes, I consider that partner's sequence shows a very good hand, in fact better than double followed by a major-suit rebid. I have a stopper in hearts and partial stoppers in the opponents' two other suits. This is IMPs and it would be cowardly to settle for a minor partscore. So I try **three notrump**. No one doubles. The full auction:

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

West leads the king of diamonds and partner puts down about what I expected:

♠ A J  
♥ Q 9 7  
♦ A 8  
♣ K Q J 10 7 2

♦K led

♠ Q 8 7  
♥ A 10 6  
♦ 10 7 4 3  
♣ 8 6 5

I have three aces and can develop five clubs. My task is to establish a ninth trick before the defenders can reach East's hand for a diamond through.

I win the ace of diamonds and drive out West's ace of clubs. West shifts to the ten of spades. The simple path to a ninth trick is the spade finesse but there are two arguments against it. First, West is marked with the ace of clubs and the top diamonds. Surely he has the king of hearts. Nowadays players respond on virtually nothing, but East must have some value for his spade response; the king of spades is all there is left. Second, even if West has the king of spades along with the top diamonds and ♥K, he will be mercilessly squeezed on the run of the clubs. In fact,

even without the ♠K, he may be squeezed into giving up his exit card in spades.

I rise with the ace of spades, and begin running clubs. West shows out on the second round. His first three discards are hearts. On the fifth club, he throws a diamond, and on the sixth, finally, a spade. The spade discard puts him out of touch with his partner. I think he is left with ♥KJ ♦QJx, so I exit with a diamond. West cashes his three diamonds and leads the jack of hearts. Dummy's queen wins and I have my ninth trick.

The full deal:

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

This deal was played by Italy's Norberto Bocchi in the quarterfinals of the 2011 Bermuda Bowl in Bali, an event that Italy eventually won.

West might have discarded differently but all roads led to the same result. You don't have to be a world champion to recognize that when declarer starts with eight tricks and one defender is saddled with the king in a key suit, there are often really *nine* tricks. Here is a similar hand from Lake Geneva played by Paolo Ranaldi:

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

The contract was three notrump after North had opened one diamond and East had doubled for takeout. West led a heart. Paolo knocked out the ace of diamonds, and won the heart continuation in the dummy. The six rounds of diamonds forced six discards from East: three

spades early ending with the ten and three clubs grudgingly. Paolo recognized the ♠10 for what it was, and played the ace of spades, catching the stiff king. East had been triple squeezed, and did the best he could, keeping his three good hearts and ♣A, and blanking the king of spades.