

Point Counter Point

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The interesting features this hand revealed came, as so many do, after a bad score. But this bad score was puzzling, because I thought I had done well.

PAIRS	DLR: North	VUL:Both
	♠ 3	
	♥ Q 3	
	♦ A Q 10 6 2	
	♣ A 8 7 5 2	
♠ 9 6 5		♠ A 10 2
♥ K 6 5 4 2		♥ A J 10 8 7
♦ J 9		♦ 8 3
♣ 9 6 3		♣ K J 4
	♠ K Q J 8 7 4	
	♥ 9	
	♦ K 7 6 4	
	♣ Q 7	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
—	1♦	1♥	1♠
3♥ *	Pass	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

* Preemptive

I led the ♥K, and duly switched to a club in response to partner's lowest heart. We thus got our three tricks. Partner mumbled that it was a pity I wasn't the one with a doubleton club, but I was silently preening over my lead.

It was disappointing to receive only a 33% matchpoint reward for this defence. Perhaps we deserved this score for jostling NS out of their less lucrative diamond game; while no one found the opening heart underlead which could lead to a plus, there was a wall of 600s. Our opponents were lucky, I suppose; we forced South to pick a trump suit that split 3-3.

The realisation that we had misdefended came much later. Actually, it was partner who had erred, but I wouldn't have done any better since I had never considered this position either. We knew spades were splitting, but declarer didn't. If East had played the ♠10 when trumps were first led towards the closed hand, we would have had a chance. With East marked with the ace, restricted choice suggests that declarer must at least consider

playing for a holding of ♠A10 doubleton.

The 6-1 trump fit gives all three active players a chance to play a role in the outcome. East must play his second highest to give declarer a guess. The selection of the jack from AJ9 in a similar position has appeared in bridge literature previously, but of course, it's easier to see the potential guess when the crucial cards are in the same hand. West must also be alert. After declarer has topped East's ten with the king, West must pop the ♠9 if declarer should go wrong by trying the ♠7 on the second round.

Perhaps the most appealing counterpoint in this combination is declarer's opportunity to foil the defenders by watching the spot cards. Notice that if East makes the henceforth obligatory false-card, the ♠2 will not appear on the first round of the trumps suit. Since few defenders play their trumps spots randomly, the absence of the lowest card is a warning that something's afoot. This clue will only be available half the time, because the non-false-carder is equally likely to have been dealt the lowest spot. Turning the cube once more, we can see that when the suit really does split 4-2, it would behave West to conceal the lowest spot on the first round.

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