

In an evening BBO game playing with Dr. John I was dealt this hand:

♠Q54 ♥K62 ♦T43 ♣K873

I pass, LHO opens 1♠, John bids 2♦, and RHO bids 2♥. If RHO had 10+ points and support for spades a 3♦ cue bid would be likely. I could raise to 3♦ at this point (nobody is vulnerable), and certainly would if RHO had instead raised spades to the 2 level, but I decide not to for a couple of reasons:

- My hand is flat; partner would not be able to ruff in the short hand.
- It is likely that the opponents' spades are 5-2 and they might score a ruff.
- If there is no heart fit, that suit is concerning as well.
- I don't want to encourage leading the suit with a holding of ♦T43.
- There are a lot of points in this deck: an opening bid, a 2-level overcall, another 2-level forcing bid, and I have 7. Maybe the opponents are going to get too high.

So I pass and LHO bids 3♣ which should be 100% forcing but strangely gets passed out.

Me	LHO	Dr. John	RHO
Pass	1♠	2♦	2♥
Pass	3♣	All Pass	

John leads the ♥A and here's what I see in dummy:

♠76
♥QJT83
♦J93
♣A94

♠Q54
♥K62
♦T43
♣K873

At trick one we want to think the hand through. RHO has overbid with 8hcp; it would have been better to make a negative double instead. The worry for me now is that John could be stronger and we might actually make +110. Since neither side uncovered an 8-card fit and declarer bid a 4-card club suit, I assume John's shape is either 3-3-5-2 or 3-3-6-1.

When your partner leads the ace, they generally want attitude (and could lead the king to get count which is what I usually do). I'd encourage with the ♥6 and declarer plays the ♥4. Now John leads the ♦A. I discourage with the ♦3 and the ♦K drops from declarer's hand.

OK that rules out 3-3-5-2, I now think John has ♠xxx ♥Ax ♦AQ8xxx ♣x. With 10hcp, I would need the 6th diamond to even dream of overcalling at the 2-level. Partner could still have a useful black card yet since dummy came up short.

John plays the ♥9, dummy covers, and I win with my king. John has set up the suit and is probably assuming I have some trump to keep it at bay for now, but what suit should I continue with?

♠76	
♥QJ8	
♦J9	
♣A94	
	♠Q54
	♥2
	♦T4
	♣K873

That is an easy decision for me. Declarer still has five spades so if partner has the king or ace of that suit it's not going away. I'm not going to play on hearts and give declarer a pitch, and I'm certainly not playing trump. John could not profitably attack diamonds with the ♦J in dummy, but now I can tap declarer by leading the ♦4. Declarer plays ace and king of spades and ruffs a third spade in dummy and then ruffs a diamond back to his hand. Now he leads another spade. What do you make of this?

♠	
♥QJ8	
♦	
♣A9	
	♠
	♥2
	♦
	♣K873

First let me ask you: based on our assumptions so far do you know what declarer has left? If John is 3-3-6-1 then declarer started with 5-2-5-1. He has spent two trump already so that leaves him with 2 spades and 3 clubs. In my opinion his trump must not be very good because he isn't drawing any of them.

John pitches a diamond and declarer discards the ♥8, allowing me to ruff cheaply - very strange. Now what?

♠
♥QJ
♦
♣A9

♠
♥2
♦
♣K87

I don't see the point of leading a club. John could have an honor and declarer is petrified. So I lead my low heart and to my surprise, declarer follows and John ruffs it.

RECOMPUTE

OK this explains a lot. Declarer amazingly started with three hearts and couldn't figure out to raise partner's heart bid. So now John started as 3-2-6-2 and declarer 5-3-1-4. The reason he continued hearts at trick 3 was to score a heart ruff. He had to wait until trick 10, but at least he got it!

It turns out that at this point declarer has a good spade and ♣QT left. Dr. John plays the jack of clubs. Declarer could win two of the remaining tricks by winning the ace and to lead a heart to score his queen of clubs. But he ducks allowing me to win the king, return a club crashing the ace and queen, and at trick 13 I'm the only one with a club left.

It's easier at this point to count the tricks declarer won: 2 spades, a spade ruff in dummy, two diamond ruffs in hand, and the ace of clubs. We took 7 tricks for +150 and a 99% board. Double dummy declarer could have only gone down 1: 2 hearts, one diamond, and two trump tricks. That would have been 68% for us, and going +90 in 2♦ would have been 83%. Had the opponents settled in 3♥ we would have scored 16%.

There isn't a lot of bridge technique involved in this hand, it's more about counting the hand, constructing a picture of the hand, and adjusting to new information. If you practice this sort of analysis, it improves your game and your enjoyment of the game – if you're willing to put forth the effort!

Here is the full hand:

♠76
♥QJT83
♦J97
♣A94

♠932
♥A9
♦AQ8652
♣J6

♠Q54
♥K62
♦T43
♣K873

♠AKJT8
♥754
♦K
♣QT52

If the auction starts 1♠ 2♦ X there are several possibilities:

- I could raise to 3♦ and very well might buy it for -50 and 48%.
- After I raise to 3♦ south should pass but north could gamble 3♥ - or not.
- If I were to pass, south would have an interesting decision between rebidding his strong 5-card spade suit or possibly playing in a perceived 4-3 fit in hearts and hoping to score some diamond ruffs.