

When declarer makes an unusual looking play, pause and reflect before following the normal line of defence. There may be some clues about what is going on.

Sitting as East, you are the dealer in a Swiss teams match and hold this balanced hand:

♠ 7 5 4 2 ♥ K Q 6 ♦ 7 6 ♣ K 10 4 3

Your opponents conduct a brief and cheerful auction:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

With 18-19 points and a balanced hand, South would have rebid 2NT, so you expect that they have based their jump to 3NT on a long diamond suit. Your partner leads the ♣ 5 and dummy is not particularly noteworthy:

♠ Q J 3

♥ J 9 6 5 2

♦ J 5 2

♣ Q 7

You (E) ♠ 7 5 4 2

♥ K Q 6

♦ 7 6

♣ K 10 4 3

Declarer selects the seven of clubs from the dummy and it's your decision at trick one. Should you play the king or the ten?

Frequently it is right to 'finesse against dummy' in situations like this, inserting the ten in order to later play the king on the queen. If partner has the jack and declarer has the ace, playing the king will cost a trick. On the other hand, declarer's play from dummy seems slightly suspicious to you for some reason.

What card do you choose?

Solution: Partner's low club lead marks them with an honour in clubs, so declarer does not have both the ace and jack. If partner has both, either of your top two clubs will work, so assume that declarer has one honour and partner has the other.

On the strong bidding, declarer is surely more likely than partner to hold the ace of clubs. But this is only half the story.

If declarer has Ax or Axx of clubs, why did they not try the queen from dummy? This would be a good chance (and their only chance) of a second stopper.

Declarer's decision to play low strongly suggests that they do not have the ace unless they have misplayed the hand. If you play your ten of clubs, you risk losing to the jack when you could have run the whole suit.

You should play the king and be confident that it will win the trick.

Your choice of play makes six tricks difference as you can see from the full deal:

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

If you find the play of the king of clubs at trick one, the defence can take five clubs and three hearts to set 3NT down four. If you instead play the ten, declarer claims 3NT +2.

You can see that if the ace and jack of clubs were switched, declarer certainly would have tried the queen at trick one.

Most defenders put to this decision in a recent national Swiss teams event failed the test despite the simplicity of the inference. It is much easier if you have seen the situation before!

Point to remember: Inference from declarer's line of play is often more reliable than assumptions you may have made during the bidding.

If declarer's play looks strange, stop and think.