

# Newcomers

## With John Koch

Playing in a club game against two earnest newcomers, I hold:

♠Q 6 2 ♥K 9 5 ♦A 10 4 ♣A 8 6 3

With no one vulnerable, I am the dealer and open **one club**, and we reach **three notrump** in this auction:

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

West leads the ♠6 and partner puts down a better hand than mine:

♠ K 5  
♥ J 8 7 3  
♦ K J 5 2  
♣ K Q J

♠6 led

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

*Preliminary analysis:*

We have a combined 27 points but the lead has attacked our weak spot. I try the king on the first trick. No luck; East wins the ace and continues with the jack and a third spade to my queen. I have seven tricks on top and need two more in diamonds. I can finesse either way, but there will still be some chances if I find East with the queen, while losing to West's queen may be instantly fatal.

I cash dummy's clubs, and cross to the ♦A. On this card, East pulls one card and then replaces it with the ♦9. What can be read from that? Sometimes newer players play their second-highest card, hoping to induce declarer to go wrong. Here it is hard to tell what East is doing, but there is no reason to be distracted from the

original plan. I win the ace of diamonds and cash the ace of clubs. West pauses and throws a spade—an interesting card. The immediate inference is that she can't afford to part with a red card. I lead the ten of diamonds; another hesitation. Finally West covers with the queen. I win in dummy as East makes a production about following with the ♦8. I have eight tricks and a ninth if diamonds break three-three. But that chance is remote after East's performance. If he has a doubleton, then West has four diamonds along with five spades and three clubs, leaving a singleton heart. West apparently didn't view the heart as disposable, which suggests that she might have the ace.

If West has the ♥A, it would be a mistake to try for three-three diamonds because that would establish a fifth defensive trick. The spade discard allows me to test hearts. I call for a small heart from the board. East snaps a low heart on the table. That supports my view that West has the ace: East might at least have given some thought to grabbing the ace if he had it. I play low and West takes her ace. She cashes a spade but I have nine tricks.

The full deal:

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

*Points of Interest:*

- The two types of bridge defenders who are most difficult to read are top experts, whose business is bridge and who are shifty to the extreme, and newcomers who are capable of anything. One has deep insight and the other has none at all. B. J. Becker's "Sylvia" was legendary for doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

- When a newcomer does something unusual, it is easy to assume he is acting the role of raw beginner, i.e. playing the queen or jack to force an honor from AK10. But just as likely, he is thinking of other things, such as giving count in the example hand.

- The final decision about the ace of hearts was relatively easy in the end. West would not have discarded a winner without a card of equivalent value, and East might have at least thought about taking the ace if he had it.