

208. Stiff Ace

Playing at the local duplicate against two regulars, I hold one of my better hands:

♠KJ ♥AQ8 ♦KQJ ♣AJ754

With neither side vulnerable, East, on my right, opens the bidding with **one club**. Twenty-point hands are always difficult when the opponents strike the first blow. Our one notrump overcall has a top range of 18 points, so I **double**. West, on my left, jumps to **two spades**—preemptive. Partner and East pass, and the enemy aggressiveness continues to cause problems. West's jump may show very little—six spades to the queen. In a bidding contest, I am sure the consensus call would be two notrump. I am a little strong for that bid, but my hand is queen-jack heavy and has no 10s or 9s or distinctive features. Nevertheless, partner may have four or five points; if he has ♦A10xx and ♣10xx, I may be cold for three notrump. Nor would I expect to hear from him over two notrump. The opponents are not imposing; I may get some extra chances. I try an unorthodox **three notrump**. No one doubles. The full auction:

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

West leads the two of clubs and partner tables his hand with a grand flourish, evoking a flutter of laughter from the defenders:

♠ 10 8 4
♥ J 7 6
♦ 10 8 7 4
♣ 8 6 3

♣2 led

♠ K J
♥ A Q 8
♦ K Q J
♣ A J 7 5 4

Initial evaluation:

Perhaps dummy is what I deserved: this hand looks hopeless. There are two tricks off the top, with work to be done in all four suits. No need to despair; these hands are often difficult for both sides. The lead appears to be a singleton. I duck East's queen, and she shifts to the five of diamonds. My king loses to the ace and a diamond runs to my queen. When I cash the jack, West discards a spade.

East appears to have started with four cards in each minor. Why haven't they led spades? Perhaps because East has a singleton! This figures to be the ace because the ♦A and perhaps the ♠Q appear to be West's full complement of points. Lacking other choices, I try the jack of spades. West pauses before playing low and East wins her ace.

It is now East's turn to think. She finally plays the ten of clubs. I finesse the jack and West throws a spade. This appears to be the layout:

♠ 10 8	♠ —
♥ J 7 6	♥ K x x x
♦ 10	♦ x
♣ 8	♣ K 9
♠ Q x x x	
♥ x x x	
♦ —	
♣ —	
♠ K	
♥ A Q 8	
♦ —	
♣ A 7 4	

I cash the ace of clubs and the king of spades (just to be sure), and exit with a club, throwing a spade from dummy. East is on lead with nothing but red cards and must present me with an entry to dummy. She tries a heart which I ride to the jack. I recount my tricks. I am up

to nine, having lost only a spade, diamond, and two clubs.

The full deal:

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

Points of Interest:

- When defending contracts when dummy is worthless, the first rule of defense is to "break no new suits." The aim is to force declarer to lead away from his strength.

- Undoubtedly the defenders thought they were being clever with the spade suit. The rule against breaking suits may have been applicable if West had the ♠A and East the singleton ♠Q, or if East had had ♠AQ. But stiff ace is a dangerous holding. East should have seized the opportunity to cash it at trick two before exiting with the diamond. Now she would have had an answer to anything declarer tried.