

BRIDGE BITES

from The American Contract Bridge League

A BLOCKING PLAY

By: Brian Gunnell

	♠ AK6 ♥ K64 ♦ J72 ♣ T984	
♠ T32 ♥ J73 ♦ AT983 ♣ A6	North West East Declarer	♠ Q9854 ♥ 9852 ♦ Q4 ♣ 32
	♠ J7 ♥ AQT ♦ K65 ♣ KQJ75	

E-W Vulnerable

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

Against 3NT, West starts out with the Diamond Ten, it's the standard lead from that holding (top of a so-called "interior sequence"). You are Declarer, and the questions of the day are "What's the big danger?" and "What are you going to do about it?"

You have enough tricks once the enemy's ♣A is out of the way. If the defenders' Diamonds are 4-3 then nothing can go wrong, you cannot lose more than three Diamonds and the ♣A. So, the danger is a 5-2 Diamond split, and you have a make-or-break play at Trick 1.

Pretending that you haven't already peeked at the E-W hands, what 5-card Diamond holdings could West have led from? One possibility is **T9xxx**, in which case you are safe whatever happens. A second possibility is **QT9xx**, in which case East will win his Ace and return a Diamond, after which the contract will depend on the whereabouts of the ♣A ... if it's in the hand with long Diamonds you are down ... if not, then you make your contract (with an overtrick).

In both the above cases it doesn't matter what you do, the lie of the cards will determine your success or failure. But now consider what to do if West has led from **AT9xx**. Low from Dummy, low from East, what do you play? You could duck, praying that the ♣A is with the short Diamonds. But the correct play is to win the first trick with the King. Now the Diamonds are blocked! When the defense gets in with the ♣A, their Diamonds are all winners but they cannot be untangled. So, the winning plays at Trick 1 are low from Dummy and the King from hand.

P.S. There is another possible West holding. He might have led from **AQT9x**, in which case Declarer may have a second stopper by playing Dummy's Jack at Trick 1. But that play also requires West to hold the ♣A. The odds are better that West has **QT9xx** than that he has **AQT9x** and the ♣A.

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