



**Steve Conrad's**

# **Master Class**



**Unblocking by  
the Defense**

# Unblocking by the Defense

Dlr: S      ♠ A  
 Vul: EW      ♥ Q109  
 Match Pts    ♦ 1098765  
                  ♣ 765

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #1

♠ QJ9876  
 ♥ 32  
 ♦ 43  
 ♣ K32



♠ K10  
 ♥ 87654  
 ♦ A2  
 ♣ J1098

♠ 5432  
 ♥ AKJ  
 ♦ KQJ  
 ♣ AQ4

South	West	North	East
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

## *Opening Lead: ♠Q*

West leads his ♠Q, won by dummy's ♠A. East must play his ♠K to unblock spades. When he later wins the ♦A, he can lead a spade and West can cash his spades. If East fails to play his ♠K on the opening lead, then EW will take only 1 spade trick, and 3NT will make. In a NT contract, when partner leads the top of an honor sequence, he guarantees a 3-card honor sequence or a broken 3-card honor sequence such as QJ9 (or else he'd lead low so you can play your honor and unblock). If partner leads an honor sequence and you have a 2-card holding with 1 honor or a 3-card holding with 2 honors (like J107), you must unblock. The same is true with a sequence of high intermediate cards, such as 9873.

Dir: W      ♠ 765  
 Vul: EW     ♥ J10987  
 Match Pts   ♦ 87  
              ♣ K32

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #2

♠ KQ  
 ♥ 654  
 ♦ AK2  
 ♣ AQJ65



♠ J1098  
 ♥ A2  
 ♦ QJ109  
 ♣ 1098

♠ A432  
 ♥ KQ3  
 ♦ 6543  
 ♣ 74

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

***Opening Lead: ♥J***

When North leads the ♥J, the top of a solid sequence, and declarer wins the opening lead with dummy's ♥A, South must be alert to a potential blocking problem with the heart suit led by North. If South routinely plays a low heart under the ♥A, then when North regains the lead and continues hearts, South can win 2 more heart tricks, but he will not have a small heart to lead to North, and the defense will not be able to cash its 4 heart winners. At trick 1, if South instead plays the ♥K (not the ♥Q, which would deny the ♥K), then North-South will be able to cash its 4 heart tricks and defeat West's 3NT contract by 1 trick.

Dir: E      ♠ A8765  
 Vul: None    ♥ 876  
 Match Pts    ♦ J109  
                  ♣ J10

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #3

♠ 43  
 ♥ J109  
 ♦ K43  
 ♣ KQ543



♠ KQ  
 ♥ AKQ2  
 ♦ AQ2  
 ♣ 9876

♠ J1092  
 ♥ 543  
 ♦ 8765  
 ♣ A2

South	West	North	East
			2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

***Opening Lead: ♠J***

North wins the lead with his ♠A and fires back a second spade, while declarer's ♠K and ♠Q fall on the first two tricks. This should alert South to the need for him to unblock the spade suit by throwing the ♠10 or ♠9 under declarer's ♠K so that he may keep the ♠2 to return to North (which would allow North to cash three more spades and defeat 3NT). If South fails to unblock his spades, then East can take at least nine tricks and make 3NT.

Dir: W      ♠ 87  
 Vul: NS     ♥ KQ1098  
 Money Br    ♦ Q432  
               ♣ 87

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #4

♠ AQJ109  
 ♥ 765  
 ♦ AK  
 ♣ Q65



♠ K432  
 ♥ J43  
 ♦ J10  
 ♣ AJ109

♠ 65  
 ♥ A2  
 ♦ 98765  
 ♣ K432

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

**Opening Lead: ♥K**

South can see he has three tricks (two hearts and one club), so he needs to find a fourth trick to defeat 4♠. If he overtakes the ♥K with his ♥A and returns a heart, he can trump the third round of hearts. That's the extra trick that North-South needs. The defense depends on what happens when the first two tricks are played. If South overtakes the ♥K to unblock his side's heart honors, he'll still have a low heart to return to North, who can lead a third round of hearts for South to trump. If South doesn't play his ♥A on the opening lead, then the declarer can use dummy's clubs to discard his losing heart and make his 4♠ contract.

Dir: W      ♠ 432  
 Vul: Both    ♥ K43  
 Match Pts    ♦ 54  
                  ♣ J9876

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #5

Rule of 11

♠ AK  
 ♥ AQ2  
 ♦ KQJ103  
 ♣ 1054



♠ QJ109  
 ♥ 765  
 ♦ 9876  
 ♣ A2

♠ 8765  
 ♥ J1098  
 ♦ A2  
 ♣ KQ3

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

### *Opening Lead: ♣7*

North leads his fourth best club. If dummy plays low, South should win his ♣Q—and if dummy plays the ♣A, South should discard his ♣K. Here's why: by using the Rule of 11, exactly  $11 - 7 = 4$  clubs higher than the ♣7 are held by the three players other than North. South can see three of those four clubs, so he knows that West has only one club higher than the ♣7. Could it be the ♣J? If so, then North led the ♣7 from ♣10987 (but North would surely have led the ♣10, not the ♣7, from that holding). Hence, at trick two, South must unblock the club suit by leading the ♣K.

Dir: W            ♠ 10962  
 Vul: Both        ♥ K9532  
 Match Pts        ♦ 8  
                      ♣ Q105

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #6

DIFFICULT

♠ AK8  
 ♥ J  
 ♦ AKQJ63  
 ♣ J72



♠ Q54  
 ♥ Q74  
 ♦ 1072  
 ♣ A843

♠ J73  
 ♥ A1086  
 ♦ 954  
 ♣ K96

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

### *Opening Lead: ♥6*

With 8 winners in hand once his side gets the lead, West is right to bid 3NT. Although, 5♦ might make, and 3NT might fail, that is a rare occurrence. Most declarers would make 9 tricks in 3NT because most Souths would reflexively take trick 2 with the ♥8, cash the ♥A, and then be stuck on lead after taking cashing the ♥10. Declarer would win the last 9 tricks. The bidding marks East with at most 3 hearts, since he did not respond 1♥. Therefore, it cannot hurt South to take the second trick with his ♥10. Then, after cashing the ♥A, he can continue with his ♥8, which North can overtake with his ♥9 to cash the ♥5 and defeat the contract.

Dlr: W      ♠ 43  
 Vul: EW    ♥ J109876  
 Match Pts   ♦ 654  
              ♣ 87

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #7

♠ AK2  
 ♥ 54  
 ♦ AQJ  
 ♣ KQJ109



♠ 765  
 ♥ A2  
 ♦ K10987  
 ♣ 654

♠ QJ1098  
 ♥ KQ3  
 ♦ 32  
 ♣ A32

West	North	East	South
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

***Opening Lead: ♥J***

Whether the heart lead is won on the first trick or the second trick, South must be very careful to unblock hearts by playing his top two honors to the first two tricks, one of the honors being thrown under the ♥A whether it is played at trick one or trick two. In fact, the whole defense depends on what happens at trick one and trick two. If South unblocks his heart honors, then, when he gets the lead with his ♣A, he'll have a low heart to return to North, who will then be able to cash enough hearts to defeat the 3NT contract. If South forgets to unblock the heart suit, then the declarer will make 3NT with an overtrick.



Dlr: W      ♠ Q10654  
 Vul: Both    ♥ 765  
 Match Pts    ♦ 543  
                  ♣ A2

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #8

DIFFICULT

♠ 987  
 ♥ AKJ  
 ♦ AK2  
 ♣ KQ43



♠ K32  
 ♥ Q1098  
 ♦ 876  
 ♣ J109

♠ AJ  
 ♥ 432  
 ♦ QJ109  
 ♣ 8765

West	North	East	South
2NT	Pass	3NT <sup>1</sup>	All Pass

<sup>1</sup>With 4333,  
 avoid Stayman

### *Opening Lead: ♠5*

In this deal, the success of the defense depends on what happens or doesn't happen at trick 1. North leads his fourth best spade, the ♠5. If South wins the ♠J and then cashes the ♠A, he will end North's chances of ever cashing more than 2 spades. Instead, South must win the opening lead with the ♠A, after which he must continue spades with the ♠J. North must overtake with his ♠Q (and continue spades if dummy doesn't win the ♠K at trick two). If not, then South will run out of spades. He'll have to switch suits, which would give declarer time to knock out North's ♣A before North-South can establish their spades.

Dir: W      ♠ 865  
 Vul: Both    ♥ AK954  
 Money      ♦ 1095  
              ♣ 64

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #9

DIFFICULT

♠ KJ73  
 ♥ QJ  
 ♦ J763  
 ♣ Q73



♠ Q10  
 ♥ 873  
 ♦ AKQ  
 ♣ AKJ85

♠ A942  
 ♥ 1062  
 ♦ 842  
 ♣ 1092

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

### *Opening Lead: ♥2*

After a heart lead, the defense can win 5 heart tricks and the ♠A. But look at the heart spots. If North plays the ♥AK, South must realize his ♥10 is a potential problem. If he keeps it, North get his 2 long hearts. North has the ♥9, so if South unblocks the ♥10 on the suit's second round, North can cash the ♥9 and his 2 low hearts. **By winning his ♥A before his ♥K, North says he has a holding that needs South to unblock** (here, he has the ♥9 and needs South to drop the ♥10). If South fails to unblock, West makes 3NT. If South unblocks, the defense defeats 3NT.

Dlr: S

Vul: Both

Match Pts

♠ KQJ109

♥ A852

♦ 96

♣ 72

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #10

♠ 4

♥ KQJ109

♦ AJ104

♣ A54



♠ 8653

♥ 74

♦ KQ

♣ KJ986

♠ A72

♥ 63

♦ 87532

♣ Q103

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♥	1♠	2♣
2♠	3♦	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

**Opening Lead: ♠K**

Unblocking can be useful in a suit contract. Here, If South fails to unblock the ♠A when West leads the ♠KQ, 4♥ will make. Declarer will ruff and play the ♥K. West will win the second heart and continue spades. On the ♠A, declarer can shed a club, win the next trick, draw trumps, and claim. North might have foreseen the problem and led a lower spade on round 2 to force South to play the ♠A. If South plays the ♠A at trick 2, then North can continue spades when he later wins his ♥A. When West trumps a second time, he'll have 1 fewer trump than North, and 4♥ will fail.

Dir: N      ♠ QJ10  
 Vul: NS     ♥ KQ2  
 Match Pts   ♦ KQ7643  
              ♣ 2

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #11

♠ K642  
 ♥ 10654  
 ♦ J10  
 ♣ J103



♠ A5  
 ♥ AJ  
 ♦ A5  
 ♣ KQ98654

♠ 9873  
 ♥ 9873  
 ♦ 982  
 ♣ A7

West	North	East	South
---	1♦	Dbf	Pass
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

### *Opening Lead: ♦9*

North should pay attention to the diamond spots very carefully. South leads the ♦9. Dummy has the doubleton ♦J10. If South has the ♦8, then North's ♦7 can be promoted if South drops his ♦8. How can North communicate that to South? When South leads the ♦9, North should play his ♦K. If permitted to hold the trick, North's next diamond should be the ♦Q. By playing the tricks in the upside down order, North is asking South to unblock the ♦8 if he has it. If South unblocks, the contract will fail. If he fails to unblock, the contract will succeed because diamonds will block.

Dir: W      ♠ QJ732  
 Vul: NS     ♥ 83  
 Match Pts   ♦ K6432  
              ♣ 5

Unblocking by the Defense, Hand #12

♠ K65  
 ♥ AQ76  
 ♦ Q10  
 ♣ AJ108



♠ A984  
 ♥ KJ9  
 ♦ 87  
 ♣ Q963

♠ 10  
 ♥ 10542  
 ♦ AJ95  
 ♣ K742

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	3NT	All Pass

### *Opening Lead: ♦3*

East's bidding showed spades, so North led the ♦3 against 3NT. South won the ♦A. With 3 cards and no honor sequence, one usually returns the original fourth best. If South does that here, the ♦K will take trick 2, but South will win the next 2 diamonds, leaving diamonds blocked. **Return the fourth highest of partner's suit unless the fourth highest card is the only card low enough to keep open communications with partner.** At Trick 2, South must return the ♦J. North will take West's ♦Q with his ♦K and return the ♦2. South will then win his ♦9 and return his carefully preserved ♦5, allowing North to cash 2 more diamonds.