

DEFENSE

UNBLOCKING SUITS

The Value of Link Cards

Bridge Lab

with the Monroes

Take Your Tricks ! Unblock and Untangle those long suits.

One of the common ways to defeat a NoTrump contract is to win tricks in a long suit. Third hand must be careful not to block the suit.

- ✓ High cards may need to be sacrificed to empower low cards and promote tricks.
- ✓ Low cards may be more valuable than high cards as a “link” to partner’s suit.
- ✓ Get those high cards out of the way.

1. What does the opening lead tell you?
2. Look at the cards in Dummy and the cards you hold.
3. Identify the “link” card to get to partner’s hand.
4. Play high card from the short side first to “unblock”.

DEFENSE PLAY

Try to visualize the trick-taking cards in partner’s hand based on the opening lead, the cards in Dummy, and the cards you hold.

THIRD HAND. The player who contributes the third card to a trick is the partner of the player leading to the trick.

- Third Hand may need to sacrifice a high card in order to unblock partner’s long suit and keep a link card.

OPENING LEADS

SEQUENCE LEADS - Top of Touching Cards headed by an honor card.

3-card Sequence against NoTrump Contracts*

Solid K-Q-J-9-6 Q-J-10-5-2 J-10-9-4

Broken K-Q-10-9-6 Q-J-9-5-3 J-10-8-4

Interior A-Q-J-7-5 K-J-10-6-3 Q-10-9-5

*Leading against a Suit Contract, a 2-card sequence is adequate.

4th BEST – Fourth highest card from the top of the longest and strongest suit. Visualize the likely cards higher than the opening lead. Q-9-8-**4**-2

- **RULE OF 11:** Subtract the number on the card led from 11. The result is the number of cards in the other hands higher than the card led.
- **THE TWO:** Opening leader has specifically a four-card suit. Third hand can now determine the number of cards in each of the other three hands.

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UNBLOCKING on DEFENSE

Board 3
South Deals

	♠ A 10 5		
	♥ K 7 3		
	♦ 8 6 4		
	♣ K J 10 5		
♠ 6 4 3	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ Q J 7 2	
♥ A 9 4		♥ 6 5 2	
♦ Q J 10 5 2		♦ K 9	
♣ 9 4		♣ 8 6 3 2	
	♠ K 9 8		
	♥ Q J 10 8		
	♦ A 7 3		
	♣ A Q 7		
11 7 6 16			
West	North	East	South
			1 N ¹
Pass	3 N ²	All pass	
	1. 15-17, balanced hand. 2. 10-15, no 4-card major suit.		

Contract: 3 NT South **Lead:** ♦ Q, Top of Honor Sequence
Declarer's Sure Tricks: ♠ A ♠ K ♦ A ♣ A ♣ K ♣ Q ♣ J = 7
Tricks Needed: 2 **Source:** ♥ = 3

Declarer's Plan. After winning the ♦ A, Declarer plays ♥s, losing the ♥ A and promoting three ♥ tricks.

The Holdup Play. With only one winning ♦ trick, if East unblocks and plays the ♦ K at trick one, Declarer holds up once with the ♦ A (Rule of 7). If East fails to unblock and plays the ♦ K at trick two, South ducks again and the ♦ suit is eliminated for the defense.

Defense. East plays the ♦ K, third hand high, trying to win the trick and at the same time unblocking the ♦ suit. When Declarer ducks, East returns the ♦ 9. If Declarer decides to duck again, letting East's ♦ 9 win the trick, what does West do? West must overtake the ♦ 9 to continue playing ♦s. West's protected entry back to the established ♦s is the ♥ A.

Ouch! If West allows East's ♦ 9 to win the trick, East must now choose another suit to lead, probably the ♠ Q. Now when Declarer plays the ♥ K to drive out the ♥ A, the ♦ suit has not been established and is effectively out of play. West can try playing the ♦ Q, Declarer wins the ♦ A, and collects enough tricks to make the contract.

Unblock. West must overtake the ♦ 9 with the ♦ 10, and return the ♦ J to force out Declarer's ♦ A. West has now the ♥ A as an entry to the promoted ♦ tricks.

Return Partner's Suit. It's usually right to return partner's opening lead and help to establish tricks in partner's suit - even if it means losing a trick or two. With a clear plan to defeat the contract, a defender may return a new suit.

Unblocking on Defense

Overtake The ♠ K

Board 1

North Deals

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

	2		
7	5		
	26		
West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	3 N ¹
All pass			

1. Balanced, 25-27 Points

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

Lead: ♥ K, Seq., East plays ♥ A

Sure Tricks: 3-♠, 4-♦, 3-♣ = 10.

Play: East wins the ♥ A (OVERTAKES, UNBLOCKS) and returns the ♥ 8. West sets the contract by winning the ♥ s.

Those High ♠ s Are in the Way

Board 2

East Deals

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

	10		
6	9		
	15		
West	North	East	South
Pass	3 N ¹	Pass	1 N
Pass		All pass	

1. No 4-card Major, 10-15 Points

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

Lead: ♠ J, top of seq., East overtakes

Sure Tricks: 1-♠, 1-♦, 4-♣ = 6.

Play: East wins the ♠ K (OVERTAKES and UNBLOCKS). East plays the ♠ Q (UNBLOCKS) forcing the ♠ A. South tries the ♦ finesse. West wins ♦ K and ♠ s.

Get Rid of the ♥ A & ♥ K

Board 3

West Deals

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

	11		
4	9		
	16		
West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1 N
Pass	3 N	All pass	

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

Lead: ♥ Q, Seq., East wins the ♥ K

Sure Tricks: 2-♠, 5-♦, 3-♣ = 9.

Play: East wins the ♥ AK (OVERTAKES, UNBLOCKS) and returns the ♥ 6 so West wins three more ♥ s.

Win the 1st ♥ Trick

Board 4

West Deals

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

	11		
8	6		
	15		
West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1 N
Pass	3 N	All pass	

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

Lead: ♥ Q, Solid Seq., East plays ♥ K


Sure Tricks: 2-♠, 1-♥, 3-♣ = 6.

Play: Declarer ducks and East wins the ♥ K (OVERTAKES, UNBLOCKS). East returns the ♥ 4. West has the ♦ A, an entry card.

Unblocking on Defense

Give Partner Valuable Information

Board 5
South Deals

♠ 7 6 ♥ Q J 9 8 3 ♦ A Q ♣ 9 8 5 2 13 9 3 15		♠ K 10 8 4 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ J 10 6 3 ♣ A J ♠ Q J 9 3 ♥ 10 4 ♦ 8 5 2 ♣ 10 7 6 4 ♠ A 5 2 ♥ K 6 5 ♦ K 9 7 4 ♣ K Q 3	♠ 1 N 2 ♦ ¹
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West North East South

Pass 2 ♣ Pass 2 ♦¹

Pass 3 N All pass


1. No 4-card Major

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks
Lead: ♥ Q, Broken seq., East plays ♥ 10
Sure Tricks: 2-♠, 2-♥, 3-♣ = 7.

Play: South ducks and East UNBLOCKS the ♥ 10. South tries the ♦ finesse but West wins the ♦ Q and promotes ♥ s.

Partner's 5th ♠ Is A Winner

Board 6
East Deals

♠ J 9 6 5 ♥ K 8 4 ♦ 8 6 5 2 ♣ A 7 11 8 5 16		♠ Q 2 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ K J 4 ♣ K Q 10 8 3 ♠ A 8 7 4 3 ♥ J 10 2 ♦ 9 7 3 ♣ 6 5 ♠ K 10 ♥ A Q 7 3 ♦ A Q 10 ♣ J 9 4 2	♠ 1 N Pass 1 N Pass All pass
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West North East South


Pass 3 N All pass

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks
Lead: ♠ 5, 4th highest, East plays ♠ A
Sure Tricks: 1-♥, 3-♦ = 4.

Play: East returns the ♠ 4 (original 4th highest), South wins the ♠ K and West UNBLOCKS the ♠ 9. South plays ♣ s. West wins the ♣ A, wins the ♠ J, and leads the ♠ 6 (link card) to East.

The ♠ 8 is a Problem

Board 7
South Deals

♠ K J 7 6 3 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ J 10 9 4 ♣ 4 12 7 4 17		♠ 10 2 ♥ K 5 ♦ A 5 3 2 ♣ A J 9 8 6 ♠ A 8 5 4 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ 8 6 ♣ 10 7 3 ♠ Q 9 ♥ A J 10 9 ♦ K Q 7 ♣ K Q 5 2	♠ 1 N Pass All pass
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West North East South

Pass 3 N All pass

Contract: 3 NT South, 9 Tricks
Lead: ♠ 6, 4th best, East wins the ♠ A
Sure Tricks: 2-♥, 3-♦, 5-♣ = 10.

Play: East wins the ♠ A (3rd hand high) and returns the ♠ 4 (original 4th highest). West wins the ♠ K and ♠ J on which East UNBLOCKS the ♠ 8.