

Sometimes more is Less - Norman's Notes No. 43

Guard Against Suit Blockage

Board 7 11th July

Two Wests at Bury Club played these hands in 4♥, and although the trumps divided 3-3 the diamond suit was not kind enough and the contract failed.

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

Two other Wests settled, instead, for 3NT and both received a spade lead. At one table declarer ducked three times¹ and won the 4th round, both defenders following all the way. How should declarer proceed? Both crossed to ♥A and ran ♦Q. North won ♦K and returned ♣K. The diamond suit was blocked and declarer could score only eight tricks (even when hearts broke 3-3). Much better, after winning ♠A, is to play ace and a second diamond. If the suit breaks 3-2 (or 4-1 with the 10 or King bare), with a club or a heart entry to dummy declarer has plenty of diamond tricks for his contract.

Running ♦Q will be successful only if South has the King. And if the King is singleton, declarer has to concede a trick to the ten (as long as North does not cover the nine).

The full hands:

Board 7. Dealer South. Both vulnerable.

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

Many (most?) Norths would lead ♣K against 3NT. South should play the knave (without seeing that card North cannot safely continue leading clubs) and declarer wins the third round. Again, ♦A and a second diamond is declarer's winning play.

¹ *A small error. A 4th round of spades from defenders is pointless; can they find a club switch instead? Declarer should win the third round of spades.*