LESSON 21c: STUDENT NOTES

Holding Up and Unblocking

Hold Up

Defenders too use some of the tactics available to declarer. They may employ a hold-up play to cut declarer off from her winners. What's sauce for the goose…

Consider the following contract of 3NT by South on ♥5 lead **(Hand 1)**:

DUMMY
♠ 952
♥ A
♦ KQJT54
♣ 962

WEST
♠ QT6
♥ QT854
♦ 7
♣ A743

EAST
♠ J743
♥ J732
♦ A62
♣ 85

YOU
♠ AK8
♥ K96
♦ 983
♣ KQJT

You have 4 top tricks. Your fabulous diamond suit could easily supply 5 more. The defenders can see that too. And if possible, they will try to shut you out of dummy, which no longer has an outside entry after the heart lead. And they can if they hold up the ♦A until you play your last one. With West having a singleton ♦, East can count that South only has 3 ♦s and know to play their ♦A on the third round.

In this example **(Hand 2)** South is in 3NT and you lead lead ♠2 (low from an honour and promising three or four ♠s)

DUMMY
♠ A5
♥ T84
♦ KQJT4
♣ 762

YOU
♠ KT62
♥ 7632
♦ A82
♣ J9

EAST
♠ Q974
♥ J95
♦ 96
♣ QT43

WEST
♠ J83
♥ AKQ
♦ 753
♣ AK85

Declarer ducks in dummy and partner wins with ♠Q, returning ♠4 (low from an original even number) to dummy's ace.

Declarer needs to promote ♦s to make the contract but there is no outside entry to dummy's eventual ♦ winners as ♠A has already been played. Declarer hopes defenders win the first or second round of ♦s, leaving him with a small diamond to lead across to dummy's winners.

Both defenders can also see dummy's lack of entries.

As West, you want to hold up your ace until declarer plays his very last one. But how many ♦s does declarer have? No easy answer!

(*Advanced - If you're playing reverse count partner can tell you by playing ♦6 & then ♦9 - eg an even number of cards*)

THIRD HAND EVEN HIGHER – UNBLOCKING ON PARTNER'S HONOUR

Sometimes, the flamboyance of playing a high honour on partner's lead of an honour is required to avoid blocking the suit and stranding partner's winners. This play is really only a variation on **high card from the short hand.**

However, do not unblock if dummy has a card that is likely to be promoted into a trick for declarer. Some typical examples:

	DUMMY	
	94**2**	
	A6**2**	
	64**3**	
LEADER		**3RD HAND**
KQJ75		**A**3
QJT65		**K**8
QJT97		A**K**5
	DECLARER	
	T86	
	974	
	82	

MORE UNBLOCKING

Perhaps less easy to see as unblocking situations are those when partner leads a low card, suggesting length and honour(s), and dummy wins the trick with a short honour.

In the following examples, **when dummy's short honour is played, you must play your lower honour in third hand to unblock.** Otherwise, when you gain the lead in another suit later, your side will not be able to take all its winners in the suit led because declarer *can simply duck* when you play your now lone honour.

	DUMMY	
	Q7	
	J4	
	A4	
LEADER		**3RD HAND**
AT8**5**32		**J**4
AK9**7**3		**T**2
KJ9**3**2		**Q**5
	DECLARER	
	K96	
	Q865	
	T876	

Bridge-Training Links

a) Practice these hands online

Hand 1 Hand 2 Hand 3 Hand 4
Hand 5 Hand 6

QUIZ

What card should East play in these situations?

a) NT 7 5 **3**
Contract

K Q 10 9 4 A 2

J 8 6

Answer: East should overtake with the **ace** - this is the only chance to run the suit in NT. If in a suit contract, East still overtakes & looks for ruff in the third round.

b) NT K 4 **3**
Contract

J 10 9 7 5 Q 6

A 8 2

Answer: At **NT** East should overtake with the **Q**. If East failed to unblock, declarer could win the ace & later duck when East played the **Q**, leaving East with no more cards to drive out the king. At a **suit** contract, however, East should usually play low since the defensive goal is just to establish one trick in the suit.

c) NT A 9 **3**
Contract

J 10 8 7 Q 6

K 5 4 2

Answer: Here East should play low regardless of the contract. The presence of dummy's **9** would allow declarer to gain a trick by finessing if East wasted his **Q**

1. What card does 3rd hand play when the cards in bold are played by opening leader and dummy? Why?

LEADER	DUMMY	3RD HAND
K	94**2**	A3
Q	A6**2**	K8
Q	64**3**	AK5

2. A little trickier here. What do you play in third seat when dummy's short honour is played in a NT contract? Can you see why?

	DUMMY	DUMMY	THIRD HAND	DECLARER
a)	AT8**5**32	**Q**7	J4	K96
b)	AK9**7**3	**J**4	T2	Q865
c)	KJ9**3**2	**A**4	Q5	T876

ANSWERS

1 a) A b) K c) K Playing a high honour on partner's lead of an honour is required to avoid blocking the suit and stranding partner's winners. This play is really only a variation on **high card from the short hand.**

2 a) J b) T c) Q **When dummy's short honour is played, you must play your lower honour in third hand to unblock.** Otherwise, when you gain the lead in another suit later, your side will not be able to take all its winners in the suit led because declarer *can simply duck* when you play your now lone honour.