

Theme of the Week: Unblocking

Unblocking happens when you cannot cash your tricks in a suit. Imagine the following suit combination between you and dummy as the last two cards:

(Dummy)

♠A

♣2

(You)

♠Kx

Say you are starting in your hand and the ♣2 is not high. The spade suit is blocked because you have the A and K, but you cannot take both of them since dummy only has 1 spade. Unblocking is an important part of declarer play to avoid these types of situations.

Hand 1

Example 15

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

Contract: 3NT, Lead K♣

Notice how in this hand the spades and the diamonds are both blocked. To take four spades tricks, you would have to play the KJ from your hand, then go to dummy to cash the AQ.

Since both spades and diamonds are both blocked we have to be careful how we play this hand. We have 4 spades, 3 diamonds, 1 heart, and 1 club if we can solve the unblocking issues.

The way to play this hand properly is to win the AC at trick 1. Then you should play a diamond to the A to unblock the diamonds so you can cash your KQ. Then once in dummy, play a spade to your K and cash your J.

Now the spades are unblocked. But before you go back to dummy, you have to cash the KQ of diamonds in your hand.

So far you have won the AC, AD, KJ of spades, KQ of diamonds for 6 tricks. The AH is your last entry to dummy where then you will cash the AQ of spades as well for the 9 tricks needed to make your contract.

The unblocking concept can be a little tricky at times, so it is important to identify early what suits can be blocked, and what you can do as declarer to make sure they are unblocked to maximize your tricks.

Dummy	
♠A76	
♥K82	
♦K96	
♣KJ82	
Partner	You
♠QJT98	♠K2
♥653	♥T94
♦J73	♦T852
♣A3	♣9754
Declarer	
♠543	
♥AQJ7	
♦AQ4	
♣QT6	

Hand 2

This is another unblocking problem, but this time on defense. Bidding: South was the dealer for this hand and has 15 points with a balanced hand. Their bid is 1NT. North as 14 points and a balanced hand and therefore responds with 3NT. West is put on lead and leads the Q♠. The main question is what card do you play at trick 1 and why?

The answer is the K♠ no matter what. We have to unblock on defense. The two situations are whether declarer ducks the first trick or takes it with the Ace.

You have to play the K in order to preserve a small spade.

Partner will win the A♣ at some point in the hand. Then they will want to cash the JT98♠, but won't be able to do that if you still have the K♠, since you will win the second spade and then have no way to get back to all their high spades. By playing the K at trick 1, you now make the JT98♠ high for partner when they get in.

It can be tougher to find these plays on defense, but they are essential and can make the difference between taking them down or letting them make their contract.