BRIDGE BITES   from The American Contract Bridge League

A TWO-EDGED SWORD

By: Brian Gunnell

♠ T762	
♥ 43	
♦ Q654	
♣ Q64	

♠ J4	*North*	♠ K53
♥ 85		♥ AT2
♦ K9832	*West* *East*	♦ AT7
♣ J975	*Declarer*	♣ AT83

♠ AQ98
♥ KQJ976
♦ J
♣ K2

E-W Vulnerable

South	West	North	East
	Pass	Pass	1NT #
2♥	3♦	Pass	Pass
3♥	All Pass		

15-17 HCP

West boldly competed to 3♦, but South pushed on to 3♥, a precarious contract which depended on playing the Spades for one loser. Given the apparent lack of entries to Dummy, that was likely to be problematic.

West led his 4th best Diamond and, as this was the Three, it was clear that West had led from a five-card suit. East won his Ace, and Declarer ruffed the Diamond continuation. Before drawing trumps, Declarer played the ♣K, hoping to force an entry to Dummy. But E-W were up to the challenge. West followed with the Club Nine, the start of a high-low count signal, telling East that West had started with an *even* number of Clubs. Armed with that information, East could duck the trick, safe in the knowledge that Declarer was not trying to sneak through her singleton King. Then Declarer played the ♥K losing to the Ace, ruffed the Diamond return, and drew the remaining trumps.

The play in the Diamond suit had made it clear that West started with the ♦K, so East needed to hold the ♠K to make up his 15-17 HCP. Should Declarer play ♠A followed by a *low* Spade (hoping that East had started with Kx)? Or ♠A followed by the *Queen* (hoping that West had started with Jx)?

How was Declarer to know? West's Club count signal (which had helped East to find the correct play when the ♣K was led) was a two-edged sword, as it also gave away the distribution to Declarer. By now West was known to have started with five Diamonds, an even number of Clubs (surely four), and two Hearts. That left two Spades, and Declarer's only chance was to play ♠A followed by the Queen, hoping that West had started with ♠Jx. Making 9 tricks!

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