

BRIDGE BITES

from The American Contract Bridge League

THE NINE OF HEARTS

By: Brian Gunnell

	♠ J94 ♥ AKQT8 ♦ J64 ♣ J3	
♠ T753 ♥ 762 ♦ K973 ♣ T2	North West East Declarer	♠ AQ82 ♥ J93 ♦ T2 ♣ K954
	♠ K6 ♥ 54 ♦ AQ85 ♣ AQ876	

When this deal was played in a duplicate club game, all but one of the 12 N-S pairs played in 3NT, scoring 9 or 10 tricks. But at one table Declarer managed to go down. How was such a thing possible? As you might have guessed from our title, the Heart Nine played a surprisingly important role in the proceedings.

Against 3NT, West found a Diamond opening lead, not the best for the defense as it happened. Declarer won that trick with the Queen, and now had to decide how to tackle the Heart suit. The odds favor playing for the drop of the ♥J, rather than finessing Dummy's Ten, and the plan was (hopefully) to cash the Hearts and to play on Clubs for an overtrick or two. But the plan changed when East casually dropped the Jack under Dummy's Ace on the first round of Hearts. Quite a play, don't you think?

This seemed like good news for Declarer, as surely there were five Heart tricks available by taking the "marked" finesse of the Heart Eight. So, Declarer led the ♣J, covered by the King and Ace, and confidently finessed the Heart Eight. Oops! That lost to East's Nine, after which Declarer could not avoid going down one! Congratulations to Dan Jacobs of Jacksonville, FL, who sat East and found that lovely Heart play.

Post Script: After Dan had won the Heart Nine he shifted to the ♠A. Could Declarer have salvaged her contract by dumping the King under the ♠A in an attempt to force an entry to Dummy? A clever play, for sure, but not quite good enough. Dan would shift to a Club and, one way or another, the defense would get their five tricks.

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