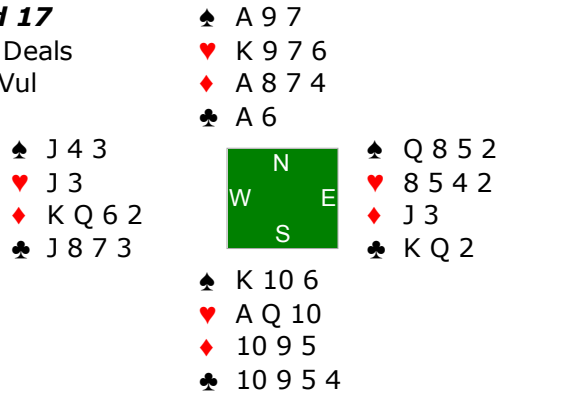
The Power of Tens

by Brian Gunnell

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul



West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1 NT	Pass	?

Put yourself in the South chair. Your partner opens a 15-17 1NT and you have to decide whether to invite game, or whether to bid 3NT all by yourself.

The usual benchmark for going to game unaided is "a good nine or better". One thing that makes South's nine-count not so good is the square shape (3-3-3-4), you can almost subtract a HCP for that alone. Does this make South's hand a "bad" nine? No, not at all, look at that awesome array of intermediate cards. All those lovely tens may not count for anything on the 4-3-2-1 HCP scale but they certainly count for something in the play of the hand, especially in notrump contracts. So, South disregards the dismal distribution and, rejoicing in those splendid tens, goes directly to 3NT.

Declarer has a minimum 1NT opening (and would have declined a game invitation) but, even so, 3NT is a fine contract. The black tens protect declarer against the enemy suits and the red tens help declarer to build tricks in his own suits. It will be ten tricks on most lines of play, but check out what happens if all of South's tens are swapped with East's lowest spot card in each suit. Now it's hard to see how declarer can scrape up more than seven tricks. Here's to those tens, the most underrated cards in the deck.