

28. Missing the Start

By Ron Klinger

North dealer : North-South vulnerable

	North		
	♠ 1054		
	♥ K10		
	♦ 9863		
	♣ K1083		
West			
♠ J83			
♥ A62			
♦ QJ2			
♣ A942			
West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

West leads the ♠J (not a universal choice; standard from J-8-3 is the 3): four – two (even number) – king. South plays the ♥4: two – king – three (even number) and the ♥10: seven – five – ace. What would you do next?

Today's deals come from a teams' match in March, 2020.

North dealer : North-South vulnerable

	North		
	♠ 1054		
	♥ K10		
	♦ 9863		
	♣ K1083		
West		East	
♠ J83		♠ 9762	
♥ A62		♥ 9873	
♦ QJ2		♦ K1075	
♣ A942		♣ J	
	South		
	♠ AKQ		
	♥ QJ54		
	♦ A4		
	♣ Q765		

South opens 1♣ in third seat and West passes. Playing Acol, where 1♣ shows a 4+ suit, North can bid 2♣, which is likely to be the contract. South figures to make nine tricks, perhaps ten, depending how the play goes. In theory, South has 3 spades, 3 hearts, 1 diamond and 3 clubs. Playing Standard American, where 1♣ can be a 3-card suit, North should respond 1♦, even though the diamond suit is terrible. One advantage of bidding a rotten suit is that it might dissuade the opening leader from starting with that suit.

At one table:

	North		
	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

	North	
	♠ 1054	
	♥ K10	
	♦ 9863	
	♣ K1083	
West		East
♠ J83		♠ 9762
♥ A62		♥ 9873
♦ QJ2		♦ K1075
♣ A942		♣ J
	South	
	♠ AKQ	
	♥ QJ54	
	♦ A4	
	♣ Q765	

The ♦Q lead and ♦J continuation if South ducks or later when in with an ace would defeat 3NT. Given the 1♦ response, why would West choose to lead a diamond? In fact, West led the ♠J, an unusual choice from that holding but not fatal in itself.

South won with the ♠K and played the ♥4 to the ♥K and the ♥10: seven – five – ace. A diamond shift now would still beat 3NT, but West played another spade. South won, cashed the ♥Q, ♥J (West ditching a club), followed by the ♣Q. When the ♣J fell, declarer had 10 tricks, +630.

There was every excuse for not finding the diamond lead, but it was feasible to find the diamond switch later. There were two clues. Firstly, when dummy has bid a suit and declarer ends up in no-trumps, if it turns out that dummy's bid suit is super-weak, that is often the place to attack. What is the second clue?

East's play in hearts. East's ♥3 was followed by the ♥7. East is known to have at least four hearts on the bidding. The ♥3, reverse count, showed an even number of hearts, so four, and the next heart, the ♥7, was East's lowest heart at that point. South had played ♥4 and ♥5 and West held the ♥2 and ♥6. The cards chosen from idle cards can be used for suit preference. If East so intended, the lowest card asked for the lower suit. From the bidding and the sight of dummy, that cannot be clubs and so East's ♥7 can be taken as suggesting a diamond shift.

At the other table:

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	2♣	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

South made ten tricks +130, but –11 Imps. South had a mental oops and forgot North was a passed hand – it can happen to any of us. Opposite an unpassed hand, 2♣ would have been 10+ points and 3♣ would have been forcing to game.

North dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	2♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) Fourth-suit, forcing to game

What would you lead as West from:

♠ J932
♥ 8743
♦ A
♣ 10986

North dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North		
	♠ A87		
	♥ 5		
	♦ J10752		
	♣ AK52		
West		East	
♠ J932		♠ 105	
♥ 8743		♥ A10962	
♦ A		♦ Q963	
♣ 10986		♣ J4	
	South		
	♠ KQ64		
	♥ KQJ		
	♦ K84		
	♣ Q73		

After the auction given, West led the ♣10, taken by the ace. The ♦2 went to the king and ace. West continued with the ♣9, won by the ♣Q. South played the ♦4: ♥4 - FJ - ♦6. With a diamond trick in, declarer knocked out the ♥A and had nine tricks (3 spades, 2 hearts, 1 diamond and 3 clubs), North-South +400.

At the other table:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♥	Dble ⁽¹⁾
3♥ ⁽²⁾	Pass	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) 4+ spades

(2) Weak, pre-emptive

East's 1♥ overcall got West off to the right start. West led the ♥7: five - ace - queen. East returned the ♥6: king - three - ♠7. There was no rush to test the spades or the clubs and so I crossed to the ♠A to start on the diamonds. Placing East with the ♦A for the 1♥ overcall and because of West's weak jump to 3♥, I played the ♦2 to the ♦K. West won and played another heart, knocking out my ♥J.

One most days, one or other of the black suits would provide the ninth trick. This was not one of those days. I made 3 spades, 3 clubs, 2 hearts and that was one light, -50 and -10 Imps.

Postscript: Even if West had led a heart at the other table, South figures to make 3NT anyway. With no 1♥ overcall from East, once East wins with the ♥A and returns a heart, South can play for split aces, cross to dummy and lead the ♦J, finessing against East's ♦Q. If South can read West for four hearts and East for five hearts, it is even clearer to place the ♥A with West. If East began with five hearts to the ace and the ♦A, too, East is highly likely to have overcalled 1♥.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. West dealer : East-West vulnerable

North
 ♠ 10876
 ♥ QJ82
 ♦ Q53
 ♣ J8

West
 ♠ 42
 ♥ K5
 ♦ 1086
 ♣ AKQ1095

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
2♣	3♠	All Pass	

West leads the ♣A: eight – two (discouraging) – four and the ♣K: jack – three – six. What would you play at trick 3?

2. West dealer : Both vulnerable

North
 ♠ QJ8
 ♥ 1032
 ♦ KJ84
 ♣ J84

East
 ♠ A4
 ♥ Q65
 ♦ A10976
 ♣ 965

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

West leads the ♦5: four – six – queen. South plays the ♠3: six – queen – ace. Your agreements include leading top from doubletons, MUD from three or four rags and if you are giving count, lowest shows an odd number, high-low an even number. What would you play as East at trick 3?

Why not discuss the problems by phone with your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

*This limerick won first place:
 To staunchly conservative Loren,
 All post-Fifties ideas are foreign.
 Our partnership ended
 When he got offended:
 I told him he's no Charlie Goren.
 (ACBL Bulletin, March 2020)*