

59. Head starts

By Ron Klinger

South dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT ⁽¹⁾
(1) 15-17			

What would you lead as West from:

- ♠ 742
- ♥ K84
- ♦ 10976
- ♣ 1053

The deal arose in a BBO session, two humans vs two robots, with teams' scoring:

South dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 106	
	♥ Q107	
	♦ KQJ4	
	♣ A964	
West		East
♠ 742		♠ J985
♥ K84		♥ AJ962
♦ 10976		♦ 3
♣ 1053		♣ K72
	South	
	♠ AKQ3	
	♥ 53	
	♦ A852	
	♣ QJ8	

At one table West led the ♦6: South won with the ♦8 and played the ♣Q: three – four – king. East switched to the ♥6. West won and returned the ♥8. East took four heart tricks and 3NT was two down, East-West +100.

At two tables, West began with a low heart: ten – jack. East returned a low heart to the king. West continued hearts and 3NT was one down. At two tables, South made nine tricks for +400 and at eleven tables South made ten tricks, +430. This usually occurred after a diamond lead. South won and ran the ♣Q to the ♣K. When East shifted to a low spade, South had nine or ten tricks.

Why did two Wests start with a low heart lead, while all the others led a diamond? 'On average, after an auction of 1NT : 3NT, the defenders hold 7.2 cards between them in each major suit. Declarer and the dummy hold only 5.8. This creates a significant bias towards major-suit opening leads.' (*Winning Notrump Leads*, by David Bird and Taf Anthias).

If you are going to lead a major, why choose hearts ahead of spades? Because if you do hit partner's suit, your holding in hearts will be much more useful than your spade cards. If partner has A-Q-x-x-x, the heart lead hits gold, but a spade lead opposite that might find declarer with ♠K-J-x or similar and partner will need two outside entries, hardly possible. Likewise, if partner's major is Q-J-x-x-x. The heart lead is magic. The spade lead might produce nothing. Other holdings benefit from your holding in hearts more than in spades.

Leading a heart is no guarantee of success. It just figures to be your best chance to defeat 3NT. At Imps or rubber bridge, that is your primary concern.

South dealer : Both vulnerable

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

(1) Weak two in hearts or in spades

(2) Equivalent to a takeout double of 2♥

What would you lead as West from:

♠ 965
♥ AK10743
♦ Q7
♣ J3

This arose in a teams' match on BBO:

South dealer : Both vulnerable

	North		East
	♠ AKQ10		♠ 432
	♥ 6		♥ Q5
	♦ AK1052		♦ 963
	♣ 1065		♣ Q9872
West			
♠ 965			
♥ AK10743			
♦ Q7			
♣ J3			
	South		
	♠ J87		
	♥ J982		
	♦ J84		
	♣ AK4		

Knowing South has a stopper in hearts, some might choose a lead other than hearts, but not Robert Krochmalik of Sydney. He put the ♥7 on the table. Paul Lavings, East, won with the ♥Q and returned the ♥5, giving the defence the first six tricks. If West leads a top heart or any lead but a low heart, South makes 11 tricks. Such is the fickleness of Lady Luck. Give East the ♥10 and South always makes 10 or 11 tricks.

At the other table, with George Kozakos (Canberra), North, and George Smolanko (Adelaide), South:

West	North	East	South
2♥	Dble	Pass	Pass
Pass	3♥ ⁽¹⁾	Dble	2♠
Pass	4♠!	All Pass	3NT

(1) Asking for a stopper in hearts

Had East passed 3♥, Maybe North would have passed 3NT, maybe not, and maybe West would have led a low heart, maybe not. There is a good case for a low heart lead. Even if the heart layout is not as favourable for East-West, a low heart lead can be best. Give South ♥Q-J-x and East ♥9-x with an early enough outside entry and the low heart lead will work.

Against 4♠, West led the ♠5: ten – three – jack. When the ♦4 to the ♦10 won trick 2, declarer drew trumps cashed the diamonds and had 11 tricks for +650 and +13 Imps.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. North dealer : North-South vulnerable

North

♠ J102

♥ KQJ743

♦ J10

♣ 63

East

♠ K9

♥ A62

♦ 87642

♣ 1085

West

North

East

South

Pass

Pass

Pass

1NT (15-17)

Pass

3♥

Pass

3NT

Pass

Pass

Pass

North might have transferred to hearts and North might have insisted on hearts, but the auction above is what happened. West leads the ♠5: ten from dummy . . . which spade would you play as East?

2. South dealer : Both vulnerable

North

♠ 5

♥ AKJ963

♦ 65

♣ J753

East

♠ 83

♥ 52

♦ AK1083

♣ K1096

West

North

East

South

Pass

2♥

Pass

1♠

Pass

4♥

Pass

3♠

Pass

Pass

Pass

4♠

West leads the ♦Q: five – three (low-like) – two, followed by the ♦J: six – king – four. What do you play at trick 3?

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

2020: The year your wheelie bin goes out more than you do.