

# 246. Starting block

By Ron Klinger

This was yesterday's problem:

Dealer East : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
2♦	2♠	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

What would you lead as West from:

♠ A876  
♥ J6  
♦ AJ943  
♣ 73

The deal arose in the final of a Sydney teams' event in 2018:

Dealer East : North-South vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 103	
	♥ 8752	
	♦ KQ106	
	♣ J82	
West		East
♠ A876		♠ 95
♥ J6		♥ Q1093
♦ AJ943		♦ 872
♣ 73		♣ A1094
	South	
	♠ KQJ42	
	♥ AK4	
	♦ 5	
	♣ KQ65	

You need a strong reason to lead an unsupported ace against a trump contract. There was some evidence in the auction above. South had shown a strong hand and 3♦ looked to be seeking a diamond stopper. North's 3♠ was either showing no diamond stopper or a hand that was not strong enough to bid game. You have to ask yourself, 'Is that a strong enough basis for leading the ♦A?' If you think not, then the ♥J would be your choice. That does not come with any guarantee of safety, but it would have worked on the actual deal.

West actually led the ♦A and switched to the ♥J: two – three (low-like) – ace. Declarer played the ♠2. West rose with the ♠A and continued with the ♥6. South won, played the ♠4 to the ♠10 and discarded the ♥4 and the ♣5 on the ♦K, ♦Q. Then came the ♠2. South lost only to the three missing aces, ten tricks, +620.

If West leads ♥J, South can win and play the ♦5. West wins and proceeds with the ♥6. South wins and now West can win the first spade and switch to a club. East wins and cashes a heart to beat 4♠.

The ♦A lead was not automatically fatal, but after that start, the counter-intuitive switch to a club is needed. East must duck (not too hard, since West would have led a singleton club rather than the ♦A). Now when West comes in with the ♠A, a second club to the ace and a club return, ruffed, beats 4♠.

A low spade lead would also work. It eliminates the possible ♠10 entry before the ♦K, ♦Q are set up.

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♦ AJ943		♦ 872
♣ 73		♣ A1094
South		
♠ KQJ42		
♥ AK4		
♦ 5		
♣ KQ65		

At the other table:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
2♦	Pass	Pass	Dble <sup>(1)</sup>
Pass	Pass <sup>(2)</sup>	Pass	

- (1) For takeout  
 (2) For penalties

With those strong diamonds sitting over North, a penalty pass by North was eminently sensible. A good guide for low-level penalties = (a) no support for partner's suit and (b) the Rule of 6 and 4: level of bidding (2) plus the number of trumps you have (4) should total 6 or more and level of bidding (here 2) plus the number of trump winners should be 4 or more (here 2 or 3). North's hand thus qualifies for a penalty pass. At the other table, when West bid a belated 2♦, North could also have passed and played for penalties.

Against 2♦ doubled, North led the ♠10: five – jack – ace. Declarer played the ♥J: two – three – king. South switched to the ♦5: three – ten – two. After ♣2, nine, queen, South cashed the ♠Q and shifted to the ♣5: seven – jack – ace. Declarer lost a spade, 2 hearts, 3 diamonds and a club, two down, North-South +300, but –8 Imps. Had 4♠ been defeated at the other table, it would have been +9 Imps.

## Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer South : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♥	Dble <sup>(1)</sup>	3♥	?

(1) 4 spades, 6+ points

What would you do as South with:

- ♠ A102
- ♥ 8
- ♦ AK94
- ♣ KJ432

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

*I am pining for a good tree pun. Why aren't they more popular?*