

393. Aiming for the max

By Ron Klinger

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

North
♠ A964
♥ KQ762
♦ 86
♣ 108

West
♠ QJ1075
♥ A9
♦ AJ97
♣ 54

West	North	East	South
			1NT – 15-17 points
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦ – No 4-card or 5 card major
Pass	3♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) Smolen, showing 4 spades, 5 hearts and forcing to game

West leads the ♠Q: ace – three – two. You play high-encouraging. Declarer plays the ♣8: nine – ace – five and the ♥8. How will you defend?

Made up your mind? Suppose the play to this trick goes ♥8: ace – two – jack. What do you play next?

Yesterday's puzzle asked what to lead as West after the auction above. What was your choice?

You have 5 spades and dummy has advertised 4 spades. The missing spades will either be 2-2 or 3 with South and a singleton with East. That makes a spade lead attractive. Maybe you can give partner a spade ruff.

Not everyone had the same idea. When the deal arose in a quarter-final match in the 2020 Spingold (USA Knock-out Open Teams), the auction went as above. West thought it was a good idea to attack trumps in order to cut down declarer's potential for ruffing spades. It turned out not to be a good idea.

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ A964	
	♥ KQ762	
	♦ 86	
	♣ 108	
West		East
♠ QJ1075		♠ 3
♥ A9		♥ J105
♦ AJ97		♦ Q10532
♣ 54		♣ J973
	South	
	♠ K82	
	♥ 843	
	♦ K4	
	♣ AKQ62	

Against 4♥ by South West led the ♥A and the ♥9. Declarer took the ♥K and cashed the ♥Q. Then came ♣A, ♣K, ♣Q, club ruff, spade to the king and the fifth club. Declarer made four hearts, four clubs and two spades, ten tricks and +420.

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ A964	
	♥ KQ762	
	♦ 86	
	♣ 108	
West		East
♠ QJ1075		♠ 3
♥ A9		♥ J105
♦ AJ97		♦ Q10532
♣ 54		♣ J973
	South	
	♠ K82	
	♥ 843	
	♦ K4	
	♣ AKQ62	

At the other table:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♠	2♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

East led the ♠3. If one plays Middle-Up-Down from three or four rags, then the lead of the bottom card promises an honour or it is a singleton. Since dummy has the ♠K and West has ♠Q-J-10 and North figures to have the ♠A, you can deduce that partner's lead is a singleton. It would be highly unlikely that East would lead the ♠3 from a holding such as A-3 or A-x-3. It is recommended not to lead away from an ace against a trump contract at trick 1. Also given the auction, North is expected to have 10+ points, South has 15 and West has 12, total 37+. On that basis, East would also not have the ♠A.

Trick 1: ♠3: two – ten – ace. Declarer played the ♣8 to the ace and the ♥3. West could rise with the ♥A, give East a spade ruff, receive a diamond return and give East a second spade ruff. When West played low, the ♥K won. Declarer then played the ♣10 to the ♣K and the ♥4. West took the ace and gave East a spade ruff. East switched to the ♦2, king, ace. West returned the ♦J for the fourth trick for the defence, East-West +50 and +10 Imps.

When the deal was replayed in a game on BBO, the auction went as at the top of page 1 and West led the ♠Q: ace – three – two. After ♣8: nine – ace – five, South played the ♥8. West rose with the ace and East followed with the ♥J. This served two purposes. It was a suit-preference signal for a spade continuation and the beginning of high-low in trumps to show an odd number of trumps.

West duly reverted to spades. Which spade should West play to trick 4?

When one initially leads a queen, which would be taken as top of a sequence and thereby promising the jack, one often plays the ten later, since partner already knows you have the jack. That would not apply here. You are hoping / expecting to give East a spade ruff and so you should continue with the ♠J, top spade as suit-preference for diamonds, the higher of the minors.

West did play the ♠J. East ruffed and switched to the ♦10 (no interest in diamonds), king, ace. West played another spade. East ruffed and cashed the ♦Q for two down, East-West +100.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♣

What would you do as West with:

♠ AK
♥ AK106543
♦ A8
♣ 109

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

To the thief who stole my glasses. I will find you . . . I have contacts.