

396. Tough start

By Ron Klinger

Dealer West : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	1NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) 2+ diamonds, playing a strong 1♣ system

What would you lead as West from:

♠ J54
♥ A965
♦ A932
♣ 63

Opening leads against 1NT are tough when you have no decent suit for your choice. Hoping to hit a long suit with partner is attractive, but here partner, who looks to have about 8-11 points, made no overcall. Of course, partner could have a weak 5-card suit, too poor in high cards for an overcall. Anything could turn out well or poorly on a given day. Noting what the top players do can be a good guide, considering the lead, the defence and declarer's play.

When the deal arose in a quarter-final match in the 2020 Spingold (USA Knock-out Open Teams), both Wests led the ♥5. This was the full deal:

	North	
	♠ KQ93	
	♥ 10742	
	♦ 65	
	♣ AK4	
West		East
♠ J54		♠ A102
♥ A965		♥ QJ3
♦ A932		♦ 1087
♣ 63		♣ Q1098
	South	
	♠ 876	
	♥ K8	
	♦ KQJ4	
	♣ J752	

At one table, it began ♥5: two – jack – king. As trick 1 marked West with the ♥9, South returned the ♥8: six – four – queen. East shifted to the ♦8, king, ace and West returned the ♦2: six – ten - queen. After ♠6: four – king – two, declarer played ♣A, ♣K and the ♣4. East won with the ♣Q. East brought back the ♦7 and South made the ♦J and the ♣J, total 7 tricks +90 (a spade, a heart, 2 diamonds and 3 clubs).

At the other table, trick 1 was also ♥5: two – jack – king. Declarer played the ♠8 to the ♠K, winning, and the ♦5 to the ♦Q, winning. Next came ♠7 to the queen, taken by the ace, and East returned the ♠10, won by West's ♠J.

After ♠6 to the ♣A, declarer cashed the ♠9 and the ♣K. So far declarer had taken 2 spades, 2 clubs, a heart and a diamond. These cards remained:

North	
♠	
♥ 1074	
♦ 6	
♣ 4	
West	East
♠	♠
♥ A9	♥ Q3
♦ A93	♦ 10
♣	♣ Q9
South	
♠	
♥ 8	
♦ KJ	
♣ J7	

Declarer played the ♦6: ten – king – ace. West shifted to the ♥9. East won with the ♥Q and cashed the ♣Q. West won the next heart, but had to give South the seventh trick via the ♦9 to the ♦J for North-South +90 and a flat board.

North	
♠ KQ93	
♥ 10742	
♦ 65	
♣ AK4	
West	East
♠ J54	♠ A102
♥ A965	♥ QJ3
♦ A932	♦ 1087
♣ 63	♣ Q1098
South	
♠ 876	
♥ K8	
♦ KQJ4	
♣ J752	

When the deal was played in a game on BBO, North opened a Standard American 1♣ and South bid 1NT, all pass. Yesterday's question was what West should lead after that auction.

The 1♣ : 1NT sequence usually heralds four clubs with responder, but not everyone is orthodox. With 4 diamonds, it is usually best to bid 1♣ : 1♦ and let opener, the stronger hand, bid no-trumps first if suitable. Responder might want to grab no-trumps first with holdings which merit protection, for example, K-x or K-J-x or A-Q or similar. On the deal above, South probably chose 1NT to protect the ♥K.

Here West's diamonds also offer a choice. Although East did not bid over 1♣, East might have a weak 5-card suit. As East is more likely to have five weak spades than five weak hearts or five weak diamonds, West began with the ♠4: king – two – seven. East did not have any 5-card suit, but the ♠4 lead fortuitously did not give declarer an extra trick.

After ♦6: seven – king – ace, West returned the ♦2: five – ten – queen. The ♠8 went to the queen and ace and East returned the ♦8: jack – three – ♥4. South exited with the ♠6 to the jack. West cashed the ♦9 and shifted to the ♣6, ace. After taking the ♠9, declarer played the ♣K and the ♣4. East won with the ♣Q and the ♥Q, king, ace and the heart return to the ♥J took 1NT one down, East-West +100. The defence made 2 diamonds, 2 hearts, 2 spades and a club.

There is a significant luck factor in which lead you choose. This time the spade lead proved all right and a low diamond lead is also good for the defence. Next time the low heart lead might be the winner.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer North : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♥	?	

Playing teams, what would you do as East with:

♠ Q843
♥ 8
♦ KQ85
♣ Q1072

What about at pairs?

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

Vodka mixes well with everything but decisions.