

Tip of the month

This month's tip is the second article on **opening leads**. Consider the following hand as West:

S A52	after the bidding goes	N	E	S	W
H KJ98				2C	NB
D 643		2D	NB	2S	NB
C QJ10		2NT	NB	3H	NB
		3S	NB	4S	NB
		NB	NB		

South clearly has a major two-suiter and probably some outside values in the minors because West himself has 8 hcp in declarer's suits. Partner will have very few hcp and will probably play little part in the defence. In short, it's up to West to pursue a strategy which brings in four defensive tricks. West has a safe lead in CQ and has tenace holdings in hearts over the declarer which might bring tricks later on. However, dummy is likely to be short in hearts and declarer's losers can probably be ruffed there if trumps are not played early on. Therefore there is a strong case for rejecting the safe lead and leading a trump immediately. As you can see from the full hand below,

North		West	
S 1076		S 43	
H 43		H 52	
D 109852		D KQJ7	
C 984		C 76532	
East		South	
S A52		S KQJ98	
H KJ98		H AQ1076	
D 643		D A	
C QJ10		C AK	

on a club lead, South can play ace and another heart and even if West then switches to ace and another trump, South cannot be prevented from ruffing one heart in dummy giving him his 10th trick. On a trump lead, West wins either the first or second round of hearts and can then play a third (or second and third) round of trumps, preventing declarer from ruffing any hearts and giving the defence four tricks – a spade and three hearts. Declarer always has ten tricks on any lead other than a trump.

Now try this second situation, holding as West:

S 843	and the bidding goes	N	E	S	W	
H AJ65				1S	NB	
D K83		2NT*	NB	4S**	NB	*Jacoby 13+ hcp with 4 spades
C K74		NB	NB	NB		** Max 13 hcp, no slam interest

The game has been bid confidently so should you make an attacking lead or lead a trump? As West has 11 hcp, clearly partner has at best 3 hcp, possibly less. Therefore, to attack from one of West's honours could be fatal. In addition, partner will have at most two trumps and a trump lead is unlikely to embarrass him. A passive trump lead is called for. The full hand is,

North		East	
S KQ96		S 10	
H Q42		H 1087	
D Q52		D 10976	
C A106		C Q9832	
West		South	
S 843		S AJ752	
H AJ65		H K93	
D K83		D AJ4	
C K74		C J5	

and, as you can see, a heart lead will give declarer two heart tricks to go with two diamonds, a club and five trumps. A diamond lead will give declarer an opportunity to end-play West with ace and another diamond after drawing trumps. A club lead will, after East has made CQ, allow a subsequent finesse of C10 for a heart discard. Therefore, 10 tricks will always be made unless a trump is led.

These examples illustrate the importance of considering the long term (complete hand) implications of a lead rather than merely the short term, ie is a particular selection a correct 'standard' lead? Selecting the latter might well be the right standard lead but would be the wrong lead for this particular hand. Think things through on the basis of all the evidence before choosing!

Dick Wheeler

July 2019