

Tip of the month

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

S J875	after the bidding goes	N	E	S	W
H 843					NB
D J43		1D	NB	1S	NB
C A96		3D	NB	3NT	NB
		NB	NB		

West rightly rejected a lead from his longest and strongest suit given South's response of 1S and he noted North's strength in diamonds. He was reluctant to lead a club from Axx and by a process of elimination he settled on H8, hoping that the up to 9 points which East was rated to have were concentrated in hearts. The following dummy went down:

North

S A
H QJ6
D KQ109862
C Q2

and declarer played low from there. East, conscious that with SA in dummy and the long diamond suit declarer might be able to make the rest and therefore he might not make HA, rose with the top card (South playing low) and carried out his own analysis. He reasoned that South might have only a singleton diamond, giving West AJxx, ie two entries, He was reluctant to lead away from CKJ given Qx in dummy and if West continued hearts each time he gained the lead in diamonds, East might eventually make the long heart. Therefore he returned H2 whereupon South claimed the remainder. This did not score well for EW. Several NS pairs had made only 11 tricks and one had gone down by two tricks. Groan! As you can see from the full hand below,

	North	
	S A	
	H QJ6	
	D KQ109862	
	C Q2	
West		East
S J875		S 432
H 843		H A1092
D J43		D 7
C A96		C KJ874
	South	
	S KQ1096	
	H K75	
	D A5	
	C 1053	

if East withholds HA at trick 1, South can only run eleven tricks through one heart, seven diamonds and three spades. More importantly, had West led a club in the first place or had East risen with HA and switched to a club at trick 2, the outcome would have been remarkably different. Let's examine the clues available.

West rightly calculated that East might hold up to 9 points but, given his weakness in hearts, such a lead would only be likely to succeed if most of those points were concentrated in hearts. If East had held something like AKxxx, wouldn't he have taken the opportunity to overcall on the first round of bidding? His silence was therefore indicative of his points being shared between hearts and clubs. Additionally, his failure to overcall with 1H could suggest greater length in clubs than hearts, and the possibility that a club lead might be the most productive as indeed it would have been. Some of you might think that East should share the 'blame' for the misdefence but, in my view, his analysis was eminently reasonable and thinking that he should have taken the first heart and switched to a club would be an example of 'hindsight is a wonderful thing'.

This hand is a perfect illustration of the need to examine ALL of the evidence available, including events which have not occurred, before making a critical decision. The 'dog that didn't bark' might be the key!

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