

Tips for the improver – opening leads – part 6

This final article focuses on a more difficult example where there is an argument to be made for a lead from any of the four suits. The bidding proceeds as follows:

W	N	E	S
1D	P	P	X
P	2C	P	3S
P	4S	End	

You are West with the following hand:

West

S 9865

H 8

D AKQJ8

C 1097

Before looking at the lead choices, some of you may have questioned West's opening bid in first position. Whilst you only have 10 points and, defending against a suit contract, your hand may be worth only one trick, you have a strong, rebiddable suit, a singleton heart (worth the equivalent of another couple of points), and a four card spade suit. These features mean that you have a perfectly respectable rebid whatever partner responds and if the opposition buys the contract, a diamond lead should get the defence off to a good start.

Now, make your lead selection and make a note of it together with the reasoning for your choice. Let's look at each of the possibilities:

- **S5** – a trump lead might be the right choice when you believe declarer will need ruffs in dummy to make the contract but here South is clearly well stocked with trumps and North probably has xxx, but at least this choice is not likely to give a trick away.
- **H8** – ostensibly an attractive option but having doubled 1D, South can be expected to have strength and length in both majors. Partner might have HA and be able to give you a ruff but as you are unlikely to take more than one diamond trick, declarer will still make his contract unless partner has another entry to give you a second ruff, an impossibility given his pass of your opening bid.
- **DA** – assuming declarer has at least a singleton diamond, this will put one trick into the bag, give you sight of dummy and give partner an opportunity to 'send' a suit preference signal.
- **C10** – leading through dummy's suit towards possible strength in partner's hand could be the right choice but his pass on first round of bidding rules out him holding, say, AQ sitting over KJ in dummy.

As you can see, there is a case to be made for each of the possibilities, so how do you reach a 'best' choice? I hope the initial analysis above tends to lead (pun intended!) you to choosing between H8 and DA. In a pairs' contest, restricting declarer to no more than the tricks to which he is entitled is often good bridge. Defence is the most difficult aspect of the game and declarers will often be 'given' an extra trick through misdefence. Leading the singleton heart, hoping to find partner with HA, may well therefore give you a good score. However, your four card trump holding suggests an alternative type of defence which might actually give you a chance to defeat the contract, particularly if partner does indeed hold HA. Assuming declarer is short in diamonds and has no more than a five card trump suit, there may be an opportunity for a forcing defence; that is a defence which seeks to reduce declarer's trumps to a point where he loses trump control.

The full hand is shown overleaf.

	North	
	S 732	
	H 1095	
	D 9632	
	C AKQ	
West		East
S 9865		S 4
H 8		H A6432
D AKQJ8		D 754
C 1097		C 5432
	South	
	S AKQJ10	
	H KQJ7	
	D 10	
	C J86	

As you can see, the best defence lies in leading DA and continuing with DK. Declarer ruffs but, after cashing SAK, realises that a further diamond lead will reduce his number of trumps below that held by West. He will switch to hearts but East will win and, tuning in to his partner's forcing defence, will continue with a third diamond. However much declarer wriggles from there the defence must come to at least a fourth trick.

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