393. Aiming for the max

By Ron Klinger

Dealer South: East-West vulnerable

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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♠<sup>(1)</sup>
                Pass
Pass
       Pass
                Pass
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(1) Smolen, showing 4 spades, 5 hearts and forcing to game

West leads the ΔQ : ace – three – two. You play high-encouraging. Declarer plays the $\Delta 8$: nine – ace – five and the $\Delta 8$. How will you defend?

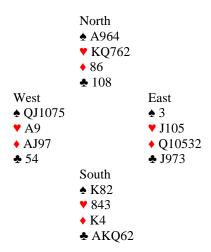
Made up your mind? Suppose the play to this trick goes ♥8: ace – two – jack. What do you play next?

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.

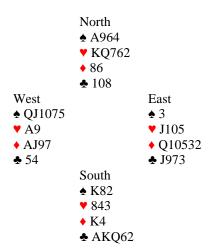
Not everyone had the same idea. When the deal arose in a quarter-final match in the 2020 Spingold (USA Knock-out Open Teams), the auction went as above. West thought it was a good idea to attack trumps in order to cut down declarer's potential for ruffing spades. It turned out not to be a good idea.

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

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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 ΔJ , top spade as suit-preference for diamonds, the higher of the minors.

West did play the ΔJ . East ruffed and switched to the $\Delta I0$ (no interest in diamonds), king, ace. West played another spade. East ruffed and cashed the $\Delta I0$ (no interest in diamonds), king, ace. West played another spade. East ruffed and cashed the $\Delta I0$ (no interest in diamonds), king, ace. West played another spade.

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.