

# 59. Head starts

*By Ron Klinger*

South dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT <sup>(1)</sup>
(1) 15-17			

What would you lead as West from:

- ♠ 742
- ♥ K84
- ♦ 10976
- ♣ 1053

The deal arose in a BBO session, two humans vs two robots, with teams' scoring:

South dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 106	
	♥ Q107	
	♦ KQJ4	
	♣ A964	
West		East
♠ 742		♠ J985
♥ K84		♥ AJ962
♦ 10976		♦ 3
♣ 1053		♣ K72
	South	
	♠ AKQ3	
	♥ 53	
	♦ A852	
	♣ QJ8	

At one table West led the ♦6: South won with the ♦8 and played the ♣Q: three – four – king. East switched to the ♥6. West won and returned the ♥8. East took four heart tricks and 3NT was two down, East-West +100.

At two tables, West began with a low heart: ten – jack. East returned a low heart to the king. West continued hearts and 3NT was one down. At two tables, South made nine tricks for +400 and at eleven tables South made ten tricks, +430. This usually occurred after a diamond lead. South won and ran the ♣Q to the ♣K. When East shifted to a low spade, South had nine or ten tricks.

Why did two Wests start with a low heart lead, while all the others led a diamond? 'On average, after an auction of 1NT : 3NT, the defenders hold 7.2 cards between them in each major suit. Declarer and the dummy hold only 5.8. This creates a significant bias towards major-suit opening leads.' (*Winning Notrump Leads*, by David Bird and Taf Anthias).

If you are going to lead a major, why choose hearts ahead of spades? Because if you do hit partner's suit, your holding in hearts will be much more useful than your spade cards. If partner has A-Q-x-x-x, the heart lead hits gold, but a spade lead opposite that might find declarer with ♠K-J-x or similar and partner will need two outside entries, hardly possible. Likewise, if partner's major is Q-J-x-x-x. The heart lead is magic. The spade lead might produce nothing. Other holdings benefit from your holding in hearts more than in spades.

Leading a heart is no guarantee of success. It just figures to be your best chance to defeat 3NT. At Imps or rubber bridge, that is your primary concern.

South dealer : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
2♦ <sup>(1)</sup>	2♥ <sup>(2)</sup>	Pass	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass	3NT

(1) Weak two in hearts or in spades

(2) Equivalent to a takeout double of 2♥

What would you lead as West from:

♠ 965  
♥ AK10743  
♦ Q7  
♣ J3

This arose in a teams' match on BBO:

South dealer : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
♠ 965	♠ AKQ10	♠ 432	♠ J87
♥ AK10743	♥ 6	♥ Q5	♥ J982
♦ Q7	♦ AK1052	♦ 963	♦ J84
♣ J3	♣ 1065	♣ Q9872	♣ AK4

Knowing South has a stopper in hearts, some might choose a lead other than hearts, but not Robert Krochmalik of Sydney. He put the ♥7 on the table. Paul Lavings, East, won with the ♥Q and returned the ♥5, giving the defence the first six tricks. If West leads a top heart or any lead but a low heart, South makes 11 tricks. Such is the fickleness of Lady Luck. Give East the ♥10 and South always makes 10 or 11 tricks.

At the other table, with George Kozakos (Canberra), North, and George Smolanko (Adelaide), South:

West	North	East	South
2♥	Dble	Pass	Pass
Pass	3♥ <sup>(1)</sup>	Dble	2♠
Pass	4♠!	All Pass	3NT

(1) Asking for a stopper in hearts

Had East passed 3♥, Maybe North would have passed 3NT, maybe not, and maybe West would have led a low heart, maybe not. There is a good case for a low heart lead. Even if the heart layout is not as favourable for East-West, a low heart lead can be best. Give South ♥Q-J-x and East ♥9-x with an early enough outside entry and the low heart lead will work.

Against 4♠, West led the ♠5: ten – three – jack. When the ♦4 to the ♦10 won trick 2, declarer drew trumps cashed the diamonds and had 11 tricks for +650 and +13 Imps.

## Problems for Tomorrow:

1. North dealer : North-South vulnerable

<p>North</p> <p>♠ J102</p> <p>♥ KQJ743</p> <p>♦ J10</p> <p>♣ 63</p>	<p>East</p> <p>♠ K9</p> <p>♥ A62</p> <p>♦ 87642</p> <p>♣ 1085</p>		
<p>West</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p>	<p>North</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>3♥</p> <p>Pass</p>	<p>East</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p>	<p>South</p> <p>1NT (15-17)</p> <p>3NT</p>

North might have transferred to hearts and North might have insisted on hearts, but the auction above is what happened. West leads the ♠5: ten from dummy . . . which spade would you play as East?

2. South dealer : Both vulnerable

<p>North</p> <p>♠ 5</p> <p>♥ AKJ963</p> <p>♦ 65</p> <p>♣ J753</p>	<p>East</p> <p>♠ 83</p> <p>♥ 52</p> <p>♦ AK1083</p> <p>♣ K1096</p>		
<p>West</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p>	<p>North</p> <p>2♥</p> <p>4♥</p> <p>Pass</p>	<p>East</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p> <p>Pass</p>	<p>South</p> <p>1♠</p> <p>3♠</p> <p>4♠</p>

West leads the ♦Q: five – three (low-like) – two, followed by the ♦J: six – king – four. What do you play at trick 3?

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

*2020: The year your wheelie bin goes out more than you do.*