

A LEADING QUESTION

The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

North-South are playing a strong club system, so 1♦ showed 11-15 HCP, but was a fairly nebulous bid. South's 3NT just says he wants to play there.

You, West, are on lead with:

♠ 7 3
♥ A Q 10 3
♦ A 7
♣ A 10 6 5 4

What would you lead and, more importantly, why?

You could lead clubs, hoping that the club suit behaves, given that you have two outside entries. For this to be successful, you need the clubs to break 3-3 or 3-2. However, it is usually correct to lead a major on these auctions. It is quite likely that South has clubs; this particular South could have made an inverted raise to 2♦ with long diamonds. Furthermore, with 14 HCP in your own hand, you know partner hasn't much to help you, so it's important to try to secure your five defensive tricks using your hand.

I believe that a heart lead is the correct choice on the auction. Your next decision is what heart to lead. Since you can't expect as much as an entry from partner's hand, you just need to find the right card at trick 1.

At the table, West found the heart lead, but led the ♥3. After the hand, she realised she should have led the ♥A to have a look at dummy, hoping that would help with the continuation. Here's the hand:

	♠ A J 10 9	
	♥ J 7	
	♦ K Q 9 5 2	
	♣ 8 2	
♠ 7 3		♠ 8 6 5 4
♥ A Q 10 3		♥ 9 5 4 2
♦ A 7		♦ J 10 3
♣ A 10 6 5 4		♣ 7 3
	♠ K Q 2	
	♥ K 8 6	
	♦ 8 6 4	
	♣ K Q J 9	

On the lead of the ♥3, Sartaj Hans rose with the ♥J, in case it held the trick. He crossed to hand with the ♠K to lead a diamond towards dummy's honours. Once West held the ♦A (though he needed West to hold all the entries, i.e. both minor aces), his contract was safe. He ended with 10 tricks for +430.

Look at what happens on the ♥A lead. On seeing the ♥J in dummy, and receiving an encouraging card from partner (after all, no switch suits the East hand), West can continue with the ♥Q, smothering dummy's Jack, and leading to defeat. 3 heart tricks and 2 aces see the contract fail.

One of the benefits of playing a teams match is that a 'bad' board is not necessarily a bad board until you score up. At the other table, North played in 3NT after an uninformative sequence: 1NT (10-12 HCP) – 3NT, which West doubled.

Many people play that a double of 3NT, when no suits have been bid/shown, asks for a spade lead. Fewer have the agreement that the double asks for a heart lead (and without a double you try a spade lead). This particular pair's agreement was that the double just asked partner to lead a major, usually his shortest major. In this instance, his partner had a nasty guess, picking to lead a spade. The outcome of a spade lead was 3NT making, for 550. So, despite the lead, the outcome was a 3 IMP gain.

To finish, let's look at leads from the holding A-Q-10-x/x .

Sometimes it is right to lead the Ace (usually when you have outside entries), sometimes it is correct to lead the Queen, and if partner may have the King you would want to lead low.

If you think dummy holds the King:

Dummy

K x x

You

A Q 10 x x

You should lead the Queen. You are allowing for the situation where declarer holds either J-x or J-x-x.

If you lead low, declarer's Jack will win, then dummy's King takes a second trick.

However, if you have led the Queen at trick 1, removing dummy's King, assuming your partner has an entry, when they get the lead they can return the suit, finessing declarer's Jack.

If you think that declarer holds the King:

Dummy

(J or x) x

You

A Q 10 x x

Declarer

K x x

You should lead the Ace, as in the discussion hand. Of course, if declarer has a doubleton King, and dummy J-x-x, you will be wrong. However, it gives you the fallback of doubleton Jack in dummy.

Such decisions are also affected by the entry situation – i.e. whether you have all the entries, or whether you can expect an entry or two from partner, permitting them to return the suit through declarer's King.

The deciding factor on the given hand was partner's known lack of entries, making the Ace the superior choice of lead.

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