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A set of four deals for V-Blue (new) series to complement David Bird's set of six hands. ACOL Version.

VB#5 Year 2 General series ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ 7432		
	♥ 987		
	♦ JT96		
	♣ 72		
West		East	
♠ QT8		♠ KJ9	
♥ KJ		♥ AQT	
♦ Q432		♦ K87	
♣ KQJ5		♣ T986	
	South		
	♠ A65		
	♥ 65432		
	♦ A5		
	♣ A43		

**This set of four deals are about opening leads. Two deals (this one and Hand 2) are about leads against No-trump contracts; Hands 3 and 4 are about leads against suit contracts.**

Let's see how you fare.

West	North	East	South
-	P	1NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♥ 5

You (South) are on lead against a confidently bid 3NT. What do you lead?

Well, this isn't really meant to be testing – when holding a five-card suit that's your usual port of call. So a Heart it is, and in many ways that is the important point of this deal. Lead a Heart and 3NT will fail. However, we must take a diversion here.

*Which* Heart you lead from such a holding is a matter of *style* and *partnership agreement*. Get two bridge players together and they can discuss this sensibly, arraign three or more and they will argue – forever and a day.

Many will always lead the “fourth-highest-of-the-longest-and-strongest” and would lead the ♥3. Others would lead “top of nothing” (also known as “top of trash”) and would place the ♥6 upon the green baize. The modern trend, though, which is gaining acceptance around the world, is to lead the “second highest from poor suits”. In this case, that would be the ♥5.

So, from a simple holding of ♥6 5 4 3 2 there are three logical choices, according to *partnership agreements*. (In fact, some players would lead the ♥2 – so make that four logical choices).

Why does it matter? In this hand, frankly, it doesn't matter at all. Not one jot. However, defenders have to try and send messages to each other to explain what they are doing. To distil this into simple terms isn't easy, but we'll try.

The lead of a low card (normally the fourth-highest) says “I have something here, this is a suit worth pursuing, please lead it back if you get the chance”. The lead of the second highest card (F'rinstance the ♠7 from ♠9 7 5 3) says “I have nothing in this suit. Lead it back only if you want to. If you can see a better line of defence, follow it”.

Why not lead the “top of trash”? Well, experience (and some have even subjected this to large amounts of computer analysis) has shown that leading the ♠9 from a holding of ♠9 7 5 3 can cost you a trick by wrecking the suit. Better to keep your powder dry in these cases. Thus, we keep the top card and lead the

second highest. The mnemonic here, by the way, is to lead a **Low** card if you **Like** the suit and a **High** card if you **Hate** it.

So VuBridge will follow the modern style. We lead the top of sequences (when a suit is headed by a Ten or higher), the fourth-highest card from suits headed by honours and the second highest card from a suit headed by a Nine or lower.


Whew! Anyway, if you return to the deal in question you will recall that 3NT went off. How? By plugging away at the feeble-looking Heart suit at every available opportunity using the three Aces as entries to the long suit. At any stage it matters not **which** Heart you lead as long as you lead one.

Partner has nothing and is probably having a doze. Accordingly, you don't actually have to signal in Hearts to tell him anything. All he needs to know is the score, and that can wait until the end of the hand.



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VB#5 Year 2 General series ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ QT973		
	♥ T8		
	♦ AJT9		
	♣ A7		
West		East	
♠ J8		♠ AK4	
♥ KQJ		♥ A97	
♦ Q643		♦ K87	
♣ KQJ5		♣ T986	
	South		
	♠ 652		
	♥ 65432		
	♦ 52		
	♣ 432		

On Hand 1 you had a decent hand with a poor suit. Here you have the same poor suit (Hearts) but the rest of your hand has deteriorated somewhat...

You aren't destined to play much of a role in this deal but you have one crucial part to play - you have to make the opening lead. Can it really matter that much?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 5

You (South) are on lead against a confidently bid 3NT. What do you lead? Well, on Hand 1 we made the point that when you hold a five-card suit that's your usual port of call. However, can that be right on this deal?

Previously (Hand 1) we had three cards of entry that allowed us to keep plugging away at Hearts and eventually establish two long cards in the suit. Here, though, what are our prospects? Sure, partner might have entries (he has to have some if 3NT is to be defeated!) and he can plug away with Heart leads but – and this is the crux of the matter – how on earth are we ever to gain the lead to cash the long Hearts when they are set up?

If you think this through you will realise that playing your long suit is *pointless*. Getting your Heart suit set up will do you no good at all as you can never gain the lead to cash it. So, then, how can we (never forget this is a partnership game!) garner in five defensive tricks?

The only way of establishing five tricks is if you locate partner's strength and lead his five-card suit. This way you (or rather, your partner) can keep plugging away in **his** suit and get that set up. So what is partner's suit? Well, it isn't Hearts, that's for sure! There is a three-way choice between Spades, Diamonds and Clubs. You have to guess which suit partner has and lead it. What to choose....? That is the question.

The straw in the wind is that the opponents are likely to look for a major-suit fit if they have got one. So dummy may well have a five-card minor but is unlikely to have a five-card major (or he would have bid it). Also, West (on your left) did not employ Stayman so is favourite not to have four Spades. A thin argument, maybe, but it is enough to sway us into leading a Spade rather than a Club or a Diamond.

In fact, on these hands many experienced players follow the guiding light of "when in doubt, lead a major". Leading a Heart, remember, is *pointless* (partner simply can't have those) so we choose a Spade. This strategy, by the way, is known as "playing for partner's hand".

After that we are (as is utterly predictable given the used tram-tickets that we were dealt) just a spectator to the battle between declarer and partner. However, the Spade lead gives our side the edge – partner can gather in three Spade tricks and two Aces before declarer can establish his ninth trick. On any other lead East has a stroll to his contract.

Now, which Spade do we lead from ♠6 5 2? Well, following the guidelines outlined in Hand 1 we start off with the ♠5 (*second highest from a poor suit*). On the second round, interestingly, we should follow with the ♠6. This sequence of plays from three small cards (lead the middle, follow upwards, and finally play the smallest) reveals in the name of MUD (for Middle, Up Down).


Here, the precise sequence of our play in Spades is irrelevant (partner couldn't care less and probably didn't notice) but it is the customary way of telling your co-defender what you are doing. From **four** low cards you would lead the second highest and then follow with the lowest card. On some days that would be important.



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VB#5 Year 2 General series ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ AQ863		
	♥ 752		
	♦ Q5		
	♣ K76		
West		East	
♠ KJT		♠ 742	
♥ K4		♥ AQJT98	
♦ A842		♦ KT	
♣ QT43		♣ A9	
	South		
	♠ 95		
	♥ 63		
	♦ J9763		
	♣ J852		

Another day, another deal, another poor hand. Your target on this deal is to make four tricks - and where are they going to come from?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
1NT	P	4♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ 9

Well, here you are, South, on lead against 4♥ bid confidently by your opponents. What card do you select from this collection of rat-droppings?

You must think clearly here. Your target is four tricks – and you are not likely to take too many by yourself. Partner will have to make a major contribution to your cause but it would be unreasonable for him to take all four defensive tricks. Might you make one trick to help the North-South cause?

When you have rubbish like this it is often a good idea to lead a **shortage** – a singleton or a doubleton – in the hope of obtaining a ruff. Here, the ♠9 works like a charm (note that you always lead the higher card from a doubleton) as North can play three rounds of Spades, giving you a ruff on the third round. Provided that you then sit there and don't fall off your chair your side will come to a Club trick in the ending for one down.

Now, a few important points.

Firstly, North can recognize your lead as being from a doubleton. How? Well, *what else can it be from?* We have led the ♠9 and we would lead the second highest from a poor suit. (So, had we chosen to lead a Spade from, say, ♠9 7 5 we would not have led the ♠9, we would have led the ♠7). Partner, therefore, can see immediately that we have a Spade shortage and is able to play three rounds of Spades, secure in the knowledge that we will ruff the third round. As an aside, this is a trap that those partnerships that lead "top of trash" frequently fall into. How can they tell how many of the suit partner has? Don't ask us!

Secondly, players tend to overdo leads from doubletons (and singletons for that matter). It is fine when your hand is hopeless (as this one is) because there is room in your partner's hand for him to hold key high cards. Here, you'd like North to hold the ♠A K, although the ♠A Q work just as well on this layout. Had your hand been better, though, your partner would have had no room for in his hand for these cards so the Spade lead would have proved less

effective. It is a truism that *the worse your hand is the better a shortage lead is*.

Finally, look at the Club layout on this hand. When you have taken your third defensive trick by ruffing the Spade return from North the contract is "tight". You can afford to get off lead and wait for what is rightfully yours – there is no hurry to lead a Club. In fact, the suit is positively poisonous – if you were to lead a Club at trick four declarer could make 4♥ by playing low from dummy. If you were to look carefully you'd see the look of reproach in partner's eyes before they glazed over and he played the ♣K, killing all hope for your side.


The technical term for this Club layout is that the suit is **frozen**. *Whoever leads it first loses out by doing so*. This is a constantly recurring theme in bridge.



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VB#5 Year 2 General series ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North		
	♠ T87642		
	♥ 52		
	♦ T5		
	♣ K63		
West		East	
♠ AQJ3		♠ K	
♥ 964		♥ KQJT87	
♦ K43		♦ Q82	
♣ A85		♣ 742	
	South		
	♠ 95		
	♥ A3		
	♦ AJ976		
	♣ QJT9		

Your hands are getting better. Having beaten three game contracts in a row you need to beat the fourth to maintain a 100% record. Yet again it all hangs on the opening lead. Your go, maestro...

West	North	East	South
1NT	P	3♥	P
4♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♣ Q

Well, here you are again, on lead to 4♥ bid after an invitational auction by your opponents. What card do you select from this collection?

There are many players, trained robotically it has to be said, who would reach automatically for a Spade here. Such players always lead shortages, regardless of any other considerations. They have their successes but they have an awful lot of failures as well.

Let us be clear about this. We stated in the last hand: *the worse your hand is the better a shortage lead is*. Here, your hand is far too good to bother with a Spade lead. What is the point? Do you really think partner can have the ♠A K (or the ♠A Q poised over the ♠K)? You have 12 points and the opponents have sailed into game. Just what do you think partner is looking at? Yes, quite. Tripe. So the chances of you generating a Spade ruff by leading one are slim – round about the chance of you winning the lottery this weekend. Forget it – it won't happen.

You do, however, have a really attractive lead to make in the shape of your Club sequence. This type of lead (from a solid sequence) cannot open up a "frozen suit" and may pave the way to setting up a trick or two in your hands. Here, the ♣Q works well – in fact it is devastating.

After a Club lead declarer is faced with four obvious losers (two Clubs and two red Aces) so has to do some dumping of those losers. With no obvious entry to dummy East is obliged to drop the ♠K on the ♠A and to try to throw the losing Clubs on the top Spades. All would be well for East if Spades were 4-4 or 5-3 in your hands. Unluckily for declarer Spades are 6-2 so you gain a cheap trick with the ♥3.

Best defence is to cash the ♥A (just so you don't get stuck on lead with it later) and to exit with a Club, nothing being gained by cashing the ♦A prematurely. Now, by sitting patiently, you come to two Diamond tricks and 4♥ drifts quietly off.

Amusingly, you may have noted, you take a Spade ruff by not leading one. Now that is ironic.

