




A set of 6 deals on opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 42	
	♥ 97632	
	♦ Q2	
	♣ KJT3	
West		East
♠ 863		♠ AKT
♥ KQJ		♥ AT4
♦ KJ873		♦ T95
♣ Q6		♣ A852
	South	
	♠ QJ975	
	♥ 85	
	♦ A64	
	♣ 974	

**This set of deals continues the theme about leading against No-trump contracts. Sometimes the bidding may guide you, often it won't. The basic ideas of the game are generally understood by most players (to wit: *Lead the fourth-highest of your longest and strongest* except when it's headed by a sequence) but there are many exceptions.**

**In two of these deals we put you in third seat – as the partner of the opening leader. Here you must *Read the Lead* to work out what is going on in the suit and to come up with the best defense.**

Hand 1 is a simple matter. Do you lead the fourth highest of your longest and strongest or something else?

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

Lead: ♠ Q

1NT – 3NT is not a helpful auction to lead against. However, many pairs prefer to play in an eight-card major suit fit if it exists (quite how they may find such a fit is not within the scope of this lesson) so it is often right to lead a major rather than a minor.

Here it is obvious to lead a Spade from a five-card suit. Which Spade, though? It might be tempting to lead the fourth-highest; after all, the suit is broken and not headed by a three-card run. The best lead in bridge is the top of a sequence when we are lucky enough to have been dealt one. Here we have a *near sequence*; ♠Q J 9 rather than the classic ♠Q J 10. In these circumstances it is best to treat the suit as being sequential and to lead the top card.

Much the same logic applies to suits headed by ♠K Q 10 (lead the ♠K), or ♠J 10 8 (lead the ♠J). Had our Spades been ♠Q J 8 7 5 we'd probably have been better off leading the fourth highest, hoping partner could produce a useful "filler" (the ♠10 or the ♠K).

Here, our lead of the ♠Q tells Pard (and everyone else at the table) that we also hold the ♠J and either the ♠10 or ♠9. Pard's ♠2 ("I have nothing here for you") tells us where the ♠A K and ♠10 are. We have now placed all honors in the suit.

Our next job is to figure out how many points Pard has. By doing some very simple math, we know he's got 4-6.

Our look at the dummy tells us the declarer is going to take tricks in Diamonds, and we need to set up our suit as soon as we can.

When declarer, at trick two, starts attacking the Diamonds, Pard shows up with the best possible card – the ♦Q. His return of a Spade at trick three, **through** declarer's holding, forces declarer to bow the knee. We take the ♠10 with the ♠J and clear the suit with another Spade lead.


When we get in with our ♦A, we collect the rest of the Spades. Too bad for the declarer we didn't have a four-card suit.

So – fourth down unless the suit is headed by a sequence or ***near-sequence***.



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VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ QJ742	
	♥ J92	
	♦ AT85	
	♣ A	
West		East
♠ 65		♠ AK3
♥ AT6		♥ KQ84
♦ Q97		♦ KJ3
♣ T7532		♣ KQ8
	South	
	♠ T98	
	♥ 753	
	♦ 642	
	♣ J964	

Sometimes (often?) you pick up a dull hand and are merely a spectator to the proceedings.

However, even with the dullest of dull hands you may have an important role to play and it's vital not to allow concentration and interest to wander.

West	North	East	South
-	-	2NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ T

On this deal you (South) are defending against the bidding 2NT – 3NT with a real heap of trash.

What do you lead? The fourth highest Club? Why, exactly?

The point about very bad hands (and this one counts as a stinker) is that there is simply no point in leading your "suit". Not only are you unlikely to establish it but you have no prospect of getting on lead again to cash it.

With this type of hand it is better to turn the usual rule on its head. Instead of leading your long suit you should try to lead *partner's* long suit. Here, with the opposition only in 3NT (as distinct from a slam) North is marked with something (a long suit, maybe, and an entry or two).

Quite what that suit may be is anybody's guess but a rule of thumb is to prefer a major to a minor (opponents tend to bid majors if they have them but tend to overlook minors in the rush to bid the higher scoring No-trumps). So dummy may well have a five-card minor but is much less likely to have a five-card major.

Here, then, the choice is between a Heart lead and a Spade lead and, with a sequence in Spades, the preference is that suit. Sure, it's lucky to hit a five-card suit opposite (there could equally well be five Hearts in the North hand) but a Spade is certainly a better shot than a Club and deserves to succeed sometimes.


Here, North-South have the *tempo* to get the Spades set up before East-West can get their Diamonds and Clubs going.

One off – bad luck, East.



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VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ KQJ85	
	♥ 64	
	♦ K742	
	♣ 42	
West		East
♠ 742		♠ AT9
♥ 753		♥ AQJ
♦ AQT85		♦ J93
♣ K6		♣ AQ53
	South	
	♠ 63	
	♥ KT982	
	♦ 6	
	♣ JT987	

On this deal you pick up a poor hand but at least it has some interesting shape with two five-card suits.

What are you going to select as your opening shot against 3NT?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
P	P	1♣	P
1♦	1♠	2NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 6

This is a simple deal with a powerful point. For those of you with long memories it is the exact same deal as we sent out in a previous edition of V-Blue; we have just moved you from one defensive chair to another.

There are three Passes to East, on your right. He opens 1♣, West responds 1♦ and your partner (having already Passed, remember) comes to life with a 1♠ overcall. East brushes that aside with 2NT and West has ample to raise that to game. It's your lead. With North South silent you would have an interesting choice between leading a Heart and leading the ♣J. However...

Let's remind you of what we said in the last edition... On that occasion you were sitting with the North cards and we asked you if you should intervene with 1♠. The answer was a resounding **Yes** because of the lead-directing effect of such a bid.

*"As a corollary, you shouldn't overcall in these positions with a poor suit because, as sure as eggs is eggs, partner will lead that suit as soon as he can. Bidding a suit for the sole purpose of attracting the right opening lead is an important (and under-appreciated) part of the tactics of the game".*

You should realize by now that the only choice for you as South is "Which Spade shall I lead?" rather than "Shall I lead a Spade?".

Out comes the ♠6 (the top of a doubleton) and down goes the contract. North-South can set up the Spades before East can get the Diamonds going – it's a classic *tempo* hand.

You should note that a Club lead would give East an easy nine tricks and a Heart lead would allow declarer to make (at least) ten tricks.



A set of 6 deals on opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ J62	
	♥ 97542	
	♦ J	
	♣ A873	
West		East
♠ AQ95		♠ K74
♥ Q63		♥ KJ
♦ KQ54		♦ AT872
♣ K5		♣ 962
	South	
	♠ T83	
	♥ AT8	
	♦ 963	
	♣ QJT4	

When you are in third seat (partner being the opening leader) a look at the dummy will often tell you what suit to lead.

Some suits are crying out to be led from one side rather than the other. And if you **Read the Lead**, you'll know whether or not to return Pard's lead or change suits.

Ready to see how that works?

<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 7

The point of this hand is that Granny's insistence on returning your partner's lead was bad advice.

On this hand, (after another simple auction) we take time to **Read the Lead**. We know that Pard's lead isn't from honors; it's a **second-highest from a poor suit lead**.

How do we know? Well, if the ♥7 were the fourth-highest what three cards can he have in his hand that are higher than the Seven? The ♥K J are on table and the ♥A 10 8 are staring at us in our own hand. The only **two** cards higher than the ♥7 that we cannot see are the ♥9 and the ♥Q. So the conclusion is that North has not led his time-honored fourth highest. Why not? Because his suit is feeble and he is uncertain of setting it up.

In these circumstances we should return partner's suit only if it suits us, not as a matter of urgent principle. Declarer tries to fool us by playing the ♥K from table at trick one, hoping that we'll take the ♥A and return a Heart to partner's supposed ♥Q.

Well, we didn't come down with the last rain shower. We do take the ♥A but we can see returning a Heart is just futile. A brief look at the dummy shows that if we are going to take tricks, we need to switch to a Club.

At trick two, we lead the ♣Q, through declarer's holding, and once again, Pard comes through with the ♣A. We know from our original count that we can't depend on him for anything else, but that was plenty. When he returns a Club, we take four Club tricks to go with our ♥A.


Here's the point of the story. Once the declarer gains the *tempo*, our chance at taking tricks is over. Look at East-West. They've got four Spades (with the 3-3 split) and five Diamonds. All they need is to get on lead. If we are foolish enough to return pard's lead, they gain the *tempo* and make the contract.

If we're going to set them, it will have to be with a Club switch. So that is what we do. And it pays off. Good things happen to people who do things good.



A set of 6 deals on opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ JT76	
	♥ T963	
	♦ 642	
	♣ K2	
West		East
♠ 532		♠ AKQ
♥ AK8		♥ QJ52
♦ 73		♦ Q98
♣ AJ984		♣ QT6
	South	
	♠ 984	
	♥ 74	
	♦ AKJT5	
	♣ 753	

Bridge is a partnership game. Yes, that sounds self-evident, but many defenders don't take advantage of that.

On this hand, you will see how partnership co-operation sets the contract.

Smile at your Pard, and let's get rolling.

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

Lead: ♦ A

Again, we are defending 3NT, and we have to lead. Some may think of leading the ♦J (or even the ♦10) – after all, that sets up the Diamonds and all partner needs is an entry so that we can cash them. Unfortunately, giving declarer a cheap trick with the ♦Q may give away the ninth trick.

If you look closely at this deal you will see that is indeed the case. A low Diamond lead will allow East to score the ♦Q, four Hearts, three Spades and the ♣A. The Club finesse would be superfluous to requirements.

A much better shot, holding all the Diamond intermediates, is to lead the ♦A, retaining control of the suit. After all, if dummy turned up with ♦Q × we'd be laughing all the way to the bank. Here, though, dummy displays two small Diamonds so we need to pause and reflect. When we *do the math*, we see that North only has 3-5 points.

At trick one North produces the ♦2. This discouraging card tells us he does not have the ♦Q, so Her Majesty is marked as being in the East hand. We need Diamonds to be led by North, **through** declarer's holding. How can we put North on lead?

Leading Hearts is a waste of time with the ♥A K on table so we are caught between the black suits. Which should we switch to? As declarer is most likely to use the Clubs as a source of tricks we should lead a Spade, playing North for the ♠A. That play doesn't work (no joy at all in that suit) but declarer still doesn't have nine tricks. With foreboding East has to try the Club finesse, hoping we have the ♣K. Nope... today is not declarer's day.

Partner takes the ♣K and returns (at round about the speed of light) a Diamond. The rest is history.

Now, here's the point. If you led a low Diamond (the ♦J or ♦10) or didn't pay attention to partner's signal and continued Diamonds at trick two, you'd give declarer the contract.



A set of 6 deals on opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

North  
 ♠ 852  
 ♥ T86  
 ♦ 62  
 ♣ QJT97

West  
 ♠ A74  
 ♥ AKQ9  
 ♦ QJ8  
 ♣ 852



East  
 ♠ J3  
 ♥ J74  
 ♦ AT974  
 ♣ A64

South  
 ♠ KQT96  
 ♥ 532  
 ♦ K53  
 ♣ K3

Sometimes you have to **Read the Lead** to know how to defend a hand correctly. We are in third seat on this deal, and, after partner fails to find the best lead, it will be up to us to save the day.

Get your super power X-ray vision ready to read through the backs of your partner's cards.

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

Lead: ♣ Q

We are back to 1NT – 3NT but at least we don't have the responsibility of the opening lead. Partner plonks the ♣Q on the green baize and we take a look at dummy. We can see instantly that a Spade lead would have broken 3NT (maybe we should have opened 1♠? No, not really, 11 point 5-3-3-2 hands are not opening bids) but for all his great qualities partner is not psychic.

We *do the math* and calculate that partner has 2-4 points. Given that the ♣Q promises the ♣J we now that North has at most a Jack outside his long suit.

We look at the dummy and hope that declarer will duck the opening lead. Why? Because we have a great defense if he does. We would overtake the ♣Q with the ♣K and switch smartly to the ♠K, setting up that suit for four tricks. The ♦K is surely going to be an entry to cash out the long Spade suit...

West may realize that we have a cunning Plan because he plays the ♣A from dummy at trick one. Now what?

This hand can go off the rails for the defense if, at trick one, we don't jettison the ♠K. The Club suit will be **blocked**. This may seem an unnatural play (chucking away a King) but remember that bridge is a partnership game and North is promising a fine suit when he leads the ♣Q.

It is not a case of "*I* will make a trick with *my* King if *I* keep it" but more a case of "**We** will take lots of tricks in **our** suit if I throw the King". Bridge is not an "*I*" game, it's a "*We*" game. Remember that... **Bridge is a partnership game.**

After you throw the ♠K declarer is helpless. He comes to hand with a Heart and tries the Diamond finesse (he has no choice in this). On taking the ♦K you fire back a Club and North cashes out his suit. One down and neatly done.