

## Learning Points – A Question of Opening Lead

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<b>S Deals</b>	♠ 105	
<b>None Vul</b>	♥ 963	
	♦ 10654	
Mike	♣ QJ42	Steve
♠ --	N	♠ AK98632
♥ Q854	W 27 E	♥ J10
♦ AKQ72		♦ J
♣ K1085	S	♣ A63
	♠ QJ74	<u>Duplimate:</u>
	♥ AK72	EW: 4N, 4♣,
	♦ 983	4♦, 3♠, 3♥
	♣ 97	

The event: 2 session Stratiflighted Open Pairs flight B at the January Cleveland Regional.

What do you lead from the South hand? Most would lead the ♥A and K. These are 2 fast tricks and hearts might force declarer. South succumbed to a different temptation.

The first lead signal we learn is the echo with a doubleton. As a novice I enjoyed leading small doubletons every chance I got against any trump contract, expecting partner to give me my ruff and set their contract.

Mike and I have found the lead of a small doubleton in an unbid suit creates more problems than it solves. We choose to avoid leading small doubletons in unbid suits except when: 1) we have AQx or equivalent of their trump suit; or 2) we have assets in the other 3 suits and fear giving up a trick or tempo by underleading them. Of course we echo from a small doubleton if we lead partner's suit. Why AQx Trumps? - if we have a trump honor *sequence* better to draw their trumps with

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	4♣

South leads ???

our high ones than ruff with them. With honors and length in trumps we look to force declarer to ruff in the long trump hand and lose control. This means leading from length in a suit we are likely to own. We don't want to trump with trump length. AQx gives us a reasonable shot at 3 trump tricks, while allowing us to control declarer's run of the side suit.

This lead agreement about the small doubleton is so strong we often infer a high spot card lead from an unbid suit to be a likely singleton. We play attitude spot card leads – low means we hold A, K, or Q and high denies a top honor but implies length. Leading from a doubleton in an unbid suit risks giving declarer tempo. Such a lead sets up a long side suit one trick sooner than the defense wants. This can cost a game-going trick. Never, never, never give away the game-going trick on defense.

Here South has no lead problem since the ♥AK is a power sequence and should be led before the cards are back in the bidding box. Our South thought differently and lost the board as a result. South led the ♣9, hoping for a ruff. This isn't a terrible lead holding ♥K7x2, but with the ♥AKxx, there should be no question. Holding ♠QJxx, South should be looking for a forcing defense. You can see that East must lose 4 tricks on the lead of the ♥A or K.

### The Bidding

**Mike (West):** I'd open this 1♦ whether playing 2/1 Game Force, Standard, or Precision (11-15 HCP at least 2 Diamonds).

**Steve (East):** I'm in love with my ♠ and we have strength and distribution for game. 1♠ is enough for now. Looks like this one will play in 4♣ – East said getting ahead of the hand. I have a hand that values to 12 working HCP and 3 distribution points – about 15 support points (Yes – but you can't count support points without support!).

**South:** I have 10 HCP and a doubleton, and they're bidding my suits. Looks like a good hand for defense, but I can't expect much help from partner. Let's pass quickly and see how this develops.

**Mike (West):** 2♣ looks better than 2♥. In 2/1 or Standard 2♥ would be a much bigger hand. However playing Precision my hand is limited to 11-15 so 2♥ would show 14-15 HCP. While I have the points, my hearts are too thin. 2♣ is sufficiently forcing for now.

**Steve (East):** With 7 spades and working ♣ points my hand should be a lock for 4♠ (Wrong!!). 4♠ it is.

**South:** This hand appears to have 3-4 tricks on its own against 4♠.

*Why South did not double is unknown. Maybe South knew what impact the opening lead would have.*

### The Play

South led the ♣9 (!!), taken by the ♣Ace. The ♦J was cashed and dummy entered with a ♣ to the King. Next came AKQ ♦, pitching 2 hearts and a ♣ from declarer's hand. That left declarer with nothing but trump, and only 2 losers in that suit. 4♠ making 5 was +450 and worth 9 of 11 matchpoints.

### Postmortem

Defending against 4♠ North/South should go plus. I confess I would have doubled with South's hand.

South	West	North	East	
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠	However a more circumspect approach by East might have guided the auction differently, and gotten to a better spot.
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥	Rather than falling in love with a 7-card spade suit, there's a better way – involve partner!
Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠	
Pass	3NT	Passed Out		2♥ is 4 <sup>th</sup> suit forcing. We play this bid as forcing to game.

North leads the ???  
 This suits our use of weak jump shifts by responder. Some play this bid as forcing one round, or forcing one round at the 2 level or without a reverse (otherwise forcing to game). 4<sup>th</sup> suit meanings change after a 2/1 game force or opener's strong reverse. Make sure you talk this with partner. Also discuss whether a jump in the 4<sup>th</sup> suit shows a splinter for opener's 2<sup>nd</sup> suit (I like this) or a long suit, perhaps even 6 cards in a weakish 46 hand (I don't like this too well).

Typically a 4<sup>th</sup> suit forcing bid shows at least 5 cards in the major suit previously bid, game values, and no stopper in the 4<sup>th</sup> suit (or East would bid 3NT directly). Responding to the 4<sup>th</sup> suit is a matter of partnership preference, but a useful priority sequence would be:

- 1) Support partner with 3 cards in the major;
- 2) Rebid your own 6 card suit (implying a stronger than minimum 64 pattern);
- 3) Show a 55+ pattern - rebid a five card second suit;
- 4) Raise the 4<sup>th</sup> suit with 4 cards (to an honor);
- 5) Bid NT with the 4<sup>th</sup> suit stopped.
- 6) If 1-5 are not right, make the bid that distorts your hand the least. Some 5422 hands or 5431 hands with a singleton in partner's major can be tough to handle. With 5422 consider a 2 card raise of opener's major if you can't bid NT, especially if you hold Hx in responder's major (H=A, K, or Q). With 5431 and no 4<sup>th</sup> suit stopper for NT, make like you have a 6 card suit somewhere and bid it! (or gamble the 4<sup>th</sup> suit breaks no worse than 4-3).

The 4<sup>th</sup> suit forcing auction caters to West having a void in Spades and good texture elsewhere. West would know to bid 4♠ with a singleton honor on this auction as it would likely be pulling full weight. East should know that West thinks 3NT is better than 4♠ opposite any rebiddable 6 card suit. Does the ♠AK 7 times qualify for a third spade bid? Not if you're listening to partner - partner can't have 2 spades or a singleton spade honor. The best possible holding is 7-1, which can play for 1 loser in 3NT with a decent break. If partner didn't have values in diamonds then we would insist on spades.

So what do you lead from North? A bottom is lurking (3NT +5 minus 460) with one misstep. Try it!