English Bridge

Standard English by Sandra Landy



STANDARD ENGLISH



MOST players find bidding far more exciting than card play and failure to reach the best contract can lead to lengthy discussions. But try as I may I cannot get the same enthusiasm for that other area where the two partners must communicate – defensive card play.

The only way one defender can pass information to their partner is by the cards played. Partners can have agreements about what it means to play a particular card in a particular situation. Of course if they have those agreements, they must take notice of the cards their partner plays.

The opening lead

Just last week, I played with a new player. She had, correctly, overcalled the opponent's $1 \forall$ opening bid with $1 \clubsuit$, but the opponents still reached $4 \forall$. The opening lead was the $\bigstar 10$. I held $\bigstar 4-2$ and dummy

Leading questions

had A-7-3. Declarer won A. I won a heart trick and had to decide what to play back. In the end I played a spade and was amazed to discover partner had started with A-Q-J-10-9. She explained she had led fourth highest – wasn't that correct?

My answer was *no*. Our agreement is that we lead the top card of a sequence. From K-Q-J-10-9 any card will do to drive out the ace of spades. But the king of spades gives information to partner about the spade holding too; leading the king of spades shows a holding that includes the queen of spades and that makes it likely that spade tricks can be cashed by the defence, so partner can judge where the defensive tricks are coming from.

Honour leads in no-trumps

The aim of the opening lead to 3NT is to win five tricks before declarer can cash nine. Sometimes we have to give up a trick to establish our winners. For that reason we normally lead our strongest suit. Where the honours held in the suit you are leading form a good sequence, that is

 ▲ K Q 9 6 2 ▲ A Q 9 6 2 ▲ K J 9 6 2 	Lead $\bigstar 6$. When suits have two honours, lead a low card. Most people agree to lead the fourth one down counting from the top. Maybe partner has a useful honour card. Partner will normally return the suit you lead if they win a trick.
♥ A K Q 2	Lead \checkmark A. Play cards from the top down. The \checkmark 2 will become a winner if neither opponent has four hearts. Do not lead a fourth highest \checkmark 2 or declarer may win a trick with \checkmark J.
 Q J 10 9 8 K J 10 9 8 K Q 10 9 2 A Q J 9 2 Q J 9 8 4 	When honours are in sequence, lead the top one Lead the •Q Lead the •J Lead the •K Lead the •Q Lead the •Q
♣ A J 10 9 6	Lead * J, the top card of an internal sequence. Perhaps declarer has * K-Q which must make one trick. But if partner gets in and returns clubs, you may have four winners to cash. Or maybe partner has * K and you can cash five club tricks straightaway.

usually the best suit to lead – see the table at the bottom left in this page.

What should you play on partner's lead?

- 1. Partner leads the jack of clubs, dummy has two small clubs. You have &K-7-4, what card should you play?
- Partner leads the six of spades, dummy has two small spades. You have ▲K-10-8; what card should you play?
- Partner leads the queen of diamonds, dummy has three small diamonds. You have ◆A-6, what card should you play?

To check your answers look at the table on the left to check possible holdings for partner. It should guide you to selecting the best card – don't read on till you have decided!

On 1, play the king of clubs. Your side can take the first five club tricks if partner has A-J-10-9-6 and will always lose two tricks if partner only has J-10-9-6-5.

On 2, play the king of spades; playing the ten of spades will allow declarer to win his jack of spades when partner has A-Q-9-6-2.

On 3, play the ace of diamonds and return the six of diamonds. Set up partner's suit and hope partner can get on lead to cash the diamond winners.

The lead of a king against no-trumps

Suppose you are on lead to 3NT with \bullet A-K-J-10-5. Clearly this is the best suit to lead, as maybe your side can take the first five tricks. A fourth highest diamond could give an unnecessary trick to the queen of diamonds, so you try the king of diamonds to have a look. (See table at the top of the next page.)

Deal	You hold	Dummy has	Partner plays	Declarer plays
1	🔶 A K J 10 5	♦ 97	♦2	♦ 3
2	♦ A K J 10 5	♦ 9 7 4	♦2	♦ 3
3	♦ A K J 10 5	♦ 9 7 4	♦8	♦ 3

What you want to know is: how many diamonds does each player hold? Who has the queen of diamonds? If declarer has it, is it in a holding of two, three or four cards?

- If declarer has ♦ Q-3, you should play your ♦ A next and the queen of diamonds will drop.
- If declarer has •Q-4-3, you should switch to another suit and hope that partner gains the lead and can play back a diamond
- If declarer has ◆Q-6-4-3, partner has a singleton diamond and you will have to give up a diamond to declarer's queen in order to establish your diamond suit. Or maybe you should switch to another suit and not give a trick away.
- If partner has the diamond queen, you can carry on playing diamonds from the top or perhaps lead a low diamond to partner's queen.

Rules for playing to partner's king leads against no-trumps

See the table below for examples.

- If partner leads a king, you play any honour you hold at trick one.
- Without an honour, give a count signal: play high-low with two or four cards, and low-high with three cards.

In the problem posed, the opening leader knows partner does not have the diamond queen. In the table above, on Deal 1 partner has one or three diamonds; declarer probably has \diamond Q-x-x, so switching to another suit makes sense. On Deal 2 partner has one or three diamonds and declarer has either \diamond Q-x or \diamond Q-x-x; play the diamond ace hoping the queen drops. On Deal 3 partner has only one or two diamonds – hope it is the two, and switch to another suit and wait for partner to gain the lead and play a diamond through declarer.

West leads ♥K from	East has	East plays	Why
♥ A K J 10 8	♥ Q 9 4	₹Q	Play honour
♥ K Q 10 9 7	♥ J 4 2	♥J	Play honour
♥ A K Q 10	♥ J 4 2	۷J	Play honour
♥ K Q J 10 9	♥ A 3	¥A	Play honour
♥ A K J 10 8	v 7 2	v 7	Show two
🕈 A K J 10 8	v 762	♥2	Show three
♥ A K J 10 8	v 7642	♥6	Show four (or two)

The examples in the last table have been taken from *Really Easy Defence*.

TEACHER'S REPORT

THE Weald of Kent Duplicate Bridge Club recently invited students from my classes to come along for a taster of club bridge. Club members were forwarned of the event; all students sat E/W; a host was available; and the Director relaxed the pace of play and announced that 'the students could do no wrong!'

Fifteen students attended and the afternoon was so successful that we are going to repeat it later in the summer and possibly make it a regular feature in our programme of events. The students made the effort, some travelling quite a distance, realising this was an opportunity not to be missed. We have gone some way in dispelling the hard image of club bridge. *Val Golding*

The Two-minute Interview

Janet de Botton



JANET de Botton is the captain and sponsor of the team that has won both the Crockfords Cup and the Hubert Phillips Bowl in 2007.

What is your main occupation? Tate Trustee for ten years.

When did you start playing bridge? I learnt with David Parry in 1998, and started playing rubber bridge a year later.

How long had you been playing before your first major success?

Six years. My team won the National Swiss Teams in January 2003. I played with Jason Hackett, and Nick Sandqvist played with John Holland.

What made you decide to compete in the Open field rather than in Women's bridge?

I needed all my time and energy to develop my team and consequently I never played with a woman player enough to form a partnership.

What would you change in bridge?

I don't think enough emphasis is put on partnerships. There are many good individual players in England but I don't think we have a successful world challenging team because we have so few developed partnerships. I also think sponsors should be encouraged more by the EBU, as great players need to be nurtured and looked after. I'm good at that!

What are your hobbies outside bridge? None!



IN the last issue I looked at the messages you send to your partner when you lead an honour card. But without a good honour sequence, you have to lead a small card.

A small card lead against no-trumps

Our aim when leading to 3NT is to win five tricks before declarer can cash nine. To do this we must create tricks that we can cash, either straight away or if we gain the lead. Our aim is to lead our side's best suit to create those five tricks needed to beat the contract before declarer can take nine tricks. Suppose the bidding has gone:

West	North	East	South
You		Partner	
	1 🔶	Pass	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

What would you lead from:

A 632
💙 Q 9 7 6
♦ 7 5
🐥 A J 5 3

Before touching a card you should think about the auction. South, with a four-card major, would have responded in that suit. So it is unlikely that South holds either four hearts or four spades, and very likely that South has four or more clubs and about 6-9 points. North probably has a fairly balanced hand with about 17 points and South suggests a maximum with 8-9 points by bidding 3NT. So you expect North-South to hold about 25 points

Leading fourth highest

between them; you have 7 points, and so probably partner has 7 or 8 points.

You want to take five tricks to defeat the contract. Whilst clubs are your best suit, we know declarer is likely to hold four or more clubs and that means that a heart is likely to be the better lead. Without an honour sequence, the normal lead is the six of hearts, the fourth highest card in the suit – that is the fourth card down counting from the top. We agree which card to lead, so that partner has a chance to place the cards in the heart suit. Let's see how the six of heart lead works.



If South plays the king of hearts on the opening lead, East wins the ace, and plays the jack and the ten. The defence can cash four hearts and one club for one down.

If South plays low from dummy on the first heart, East must play the ten – always play the lower card from touching honours when following suit to help partner read the cards. The heart ten wins trick one.

East cannot play another heart without setting up the king as a winner. On this deal, a switch to the two of clubs is fairly obvious, as North has the other suits well stopped. South might try to win the trick by playing the king of clubs, but West can win the club ace and play another heart. Now the defence can cash four hearts and if they are careful, four clubs too.

If South plays low on the first club, West wins the trick with the jack. West knows East has the heart jack or declarer would have used it to win trick one. So West wins the club and plays another heart. No doubt declarer will try the king this time and now the defence can cash both their heart and club tricks. Again, four down is possible.

If West leads the three of clubs at trick one, the strongest suit in the West hand, South makes two spades, six diamonds and a club, and 3NT makes nine tricks!

Leading fourth highest

Whether you notice it or not, every card played carries some sort of message. You and your partner can ignore that message if you wish, but it makes sense to try and decode the messages in the cards played.

Leading suits with a good honour sequence was covered in the last issue, but often we have more boring suits. In that case we agree that, when leading our long suit, we will lead a small card and most people play the fourth one down counting from the top. Then partner will know you have three cards higher than the one you lead and that those cards are not in a sequence.

The Rule of Eleven

When partner leads a fourth-highest card, you can work out how many cards declarer holds that are higher than the card led. On the deal shown, the lead was the heart six. East can see one card in dummy higher than the six of hearts and three in his own hand. The leader also has three hearts bigger than the six. There are *eight* cards in total higher than the six of hearts; you know about seven of them and the remaining one must be in declarer's hand.

Subtract the pips on the card led from eleven; the result gives the number of higher cards than the one led in the other three hands.

Not very interesting, you may think, but consider this problem:



Partner leads the heart seven, declarer plays dummy's three. Which card do you play?

Try the Rule of Eleven. Partner has led the seven of hearts; 11 - 7 = 4.

You and dummy have four cards higher than the seven, so declarer has no hearts higher than the seven – and can only have a singleton heart or the \checkmark 6-4 doubleton. Partner must have the \checkmark A-Q-9-7 and maybe the heart six or heart four as well. You should play your two of hearts and partner's seven of hearts will win the trick! If you play your jack of hearts declarer will have two heart stoppers.

Try these problems

In both cases the bidding has gone: 1NT, raised straight to 3NT.



Partner leads the club seven, declarer plays dummy's two. Which card do you play? Why?



Partner leads the five of spades, declarer plays dummy's seven. Which card do you play? Why?

Answers

The three of clubs and the eight of spades. The Rule of Eleven works in both cases. \Box

Prizes kindly donated by PIATNIK, makers of playing cards since 1824

QUIZ master Julian Pottage gives his view of the best line of play in our August competition and awards prizes in three categories.



West	North	East	South
			1 🛦
Pass	2 🔶	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

West leads the three of hearts, East plays the king of hearts and you win.

You can see five top tricks in the majors. You might make the four more tricks you need either with two in each minor or with four in diamonds. If you play on clubs, you will lose the lead twice and go down if a defender has five hearts and the ace of diamonds. Clearly you do better to play on diamonds.

If the diamond ace is short, you should be able to make four diamond tricks. Now suppose that an opponent can hold up for two rounds. If you knock out the ace of diamonds, you will also have to knock out the ace of clubs to reach the good diamonds. You will then go down if someone has five hearts and the ace of clubs. Instead, with two diamond tricks in the bag, you should switch to clubs.

There is one more important point. If West has \blacklozenge A-10-x-x, or \blacklozenge 10-x-x-x, you may go down if you play the three to the king. West may be able to take the ace on the second round, leaving the diamonds blocked. Since you do not want to lead the jack and lose to a possible bare ace on your left, you should start with the nine.

Note that it would be wrong to play three rounds of spades early. Then you might go down even if the opposition's hearts are divided 4-3.

Congratulations to the winners: Open: Malcolm Young, Allestree Regional: Bryan Wynne, Isleham County: Geoff Lacey, Harpenden Our new PIATNIK Prize Play Quiz is on page 29.

DIANA WILLIAMS

WE are sad to inform members of the death of Diana Williams, a former England Ladies International and a great supporter of English bridge.

Diana learnt bridge early on with her parents at the Deva Bridge Club in Chester, where she later met her future husband, Arthur. Once married and living in London, they played in Surrey, where they won the county's major honours.

In Surrey Diana formed a partnership with Maureen Dennison and won many major championships as part of the Great Britain team, including the Common Market championships in 1979 and 1981, the European championship in 1981 and the Venice Cup World Championships in 1981. In the early '80s, Diana moved to Worcestershire and effectively retired from international bridge. However, she still won the Lady Milne with Jane Spence, amongst many county honours.

Diana contributed a great deal to developing both individual players and the county teams in Worcestershire. In the last few years, Diana devoted her spare time to founding and running a local charity called PEAL: Parents Experiencing Adult Loss.

Our sincere condolences go to her family and friends. She will be sadly missed.

Leading against suit contracts

WHAT is a good lead against a no trump contract may be a very poor lead against a suit contract. For example, you hold:



If your right-hand opponent opens 1NT which is raised to 3NT, you would lead the six of diamonds without hesitation. You may well give declarer a diamond trick, but you

hope to set up four diamond winners in your hand. You hope partner will gain the lead and return a diamond, so you can cash your four diamond winners and beat 3NT.

But if the opening bid is $1 \triangleq$ and the opponents reach $4 \triangleq$, the six of diamonds is a very poor lead as it may well give a trick away. Partner will return a diamond when on lead, but you won't be able to cash four diamond tricks as declarer will be able to ruff your winning diamonds.

If someone held a gun to your head and said you must lead a diamond, you would lead the ace to make sure you got at least one diamond trick. But it would be better to choose another suit, a heart or a club, and wait for someone else to play diamonds.

Let's see how a heart lead works.



Pass	2 A	Pe
All Pass		

South wins the ace of hearts and plays the king of spades. Your partner wins the ace of spades and leads the nine of diamonds, South plays the jack and you win with the queen. Now you can cash your ace of diamonds and give your partner a diamond ruff. You would know partner only had a doubleton diamond because the switch to the nine denied a higher card, so declarer must have the king, jack and ten of diamonds. By not leading a diamond you actually made both your ace and queen in the suit, and partner made the setting trick with the two of spades. In suit contracts little cards can win big tricks

Actually South could and should have made 4 even on a heart lead; can you see how? (Answer at the bottom of the page.)

A different scenario

Hand B			
٨	432		
¥	98		
٠	K Q J 10 5	5	
÷	864		

Now suppose you had held Hand B. The diamond king is a very good lead, just as it would be against 3NT. You want to drive out declarer's ace of diamonds and set up diayour side to cash before

mond winners for your side to cash before declarer can discard his diamond losers on a side suit. Of course, because there is a trump suit you do not expect to take four diamond tricks, but you want to take as many tricks as are available in the diamond suit – maybe just one, perhaps two if both declarer and dummy have three diamonds.

Our main aim when leading to a suit contract is not to give away tricks to declarer. This is why that diamond king, or any three honour card sequence (A-K-Q,

K-Q-J, Q-J-10) is always a good lead.

Sometimes no suit is attractive to lead and we have to resort to a fourth highest lead. On Hand C, the





five of diamonds is probably the best chance, hoping that partner can produce a useful card and help set up a diamond winner.

What if you don't have a sequence?

Of course we don't always have nice solid sequences to lead. Nor may you have a long suit with honours. With Hand A, I suggested that you might lead a heart. The actual heart you should choose is the eight. We lead MUD, the middle card from three cards without an honour. If you had decided to lead a club from the eight, six and four, you would have chosen the six. On the next round you would have played the eight of clubs, since MUD stands for Middle Up Down.

Also on the deal above, I said East would switch to the nine of diamonds and play the diamond three on the next round. This shows a doubleton because you have not made a MUD lead.

People used to play 'Top of Nothing' – the highest card in a suit with no honour – whether they held two or three or four cards. This made it very hard to defend well, which is why most people now play MUD.

Answer

South must play three rounds of clubs throwing a diamond away from hand before touching trumps. Now West can make win the ace and queen of diamonds but South will overruff the third diamond and draw all the trumps. The heart loser can be ruffed in dummy.



MY last article was about choosing the opening lead to a suit contract. I showed you Hand A, where against 3NT you would lead the six of diamonds, but against 4 you

Hand A
A 8 3
v 982
🔶 A Q 7 6 5
& 864

would do better to choose a heart or a club. But what would you lead if the auction had been completely different? It might go

West	North	East	South
	1*	1 🛦	2♥
Pass	4 💙		

Different auction, different contract may well mean a different lead is needed. Here your partner has helpfully made an overcall and there is no reason to lead anything but a spade. With only two spades, our partnership agreement is to lead the eight, the higher card from a doubleton.



Here is the complete deal. On the eight of spades lead, South should play the nine from dummy as East must hold the ace of

Playing for ruffs

spades, so playing the spade king won't win the trick. East plays the ten of spades and can tell from your spade eight lead that you hold a doubleton. So East cashes the spade ace next and then plays a third spade. You ruff and cash your ace of diamonds for the setting trick.

If you don't take your ace now, you won't make it. South can set up club winners by ruffing the third round of clubs and then crossing to dummy with a trump to discard the remaining diamonds on North's clubs.

Note how helpful East's $1 \bigstar$ overcall was. East may only have 9 high-card points but an overcall at the one level doesn't promise opening bid values. It shows at least a fivecard suit with a good honour holding. Its aim is to disrupt the opponents' auction after North has opened the bidding. On this deal South was strong enough to bid $2 \checkmark$ so the heart suit was not lost. But sometimes the overcall will make it difficult for the opponents to find their best contract.

Note also that East played the ten of spades when following to the first spade. That is another partnership agreement. When following suit, play the lowest card that will do the job. When the ten of spades holds, West knows that East has \diamond Q-J as well as the ten. The spade queen would win trick one just as well as the spade ten but it doesn't send extra useful information to West.

Let's change your hand, so that you have three spades.



You would still lead a spade against the 4♥ contract because your partner bid them. But now you want your lead to suggest you hold *three* spades, so you should choose the that our partnership

five. Remember that our partnership agreement is to play MUD leads. MUD stands for <u>Middle Up</u> <u>D</u>own; you lead the middle card from three cards without an honour. On the next round you play up, that is the eight of spades, and partner knows you started with three spades.

Not all bridge players use MUD, some would always lead the eight of spades. This is called a 'Top of Nothing' lead. It shows very clearly that no honour is held, but third hand cannot tell whether you have two or three spades. Consider what happens if you have three spades:



You lead the five of spades. With only two spades, declarer might play the king from dummy and East's ace wins the trick. East probably cashes the spade queen and might try the spade jack next, hoping that declarer has three spades. But on seeing your eight of spades, East should realise that you have three spades and so declarer only has two. So another spade will be ruffed by South. East should switch to the two of diamonds, leading up to dummy's weakness; now your two diamond tricks will beat 4♥.

Suppose South opens 1♥ and North bids 4♥. What do you lead from Hand A?

This time you don't have East's helpful overcall to guide you. Leading a heart is doing declarer's job for him. Again, a fourth highest diamond would be wrong, so it has to be a club or a spade. Even though partner has not overcalled, it is right to lead a spade. Partner might still be able to give you a spade ruff, whereas that won't be possible in clubs.

If choosing between two suits without honours, it is often right to lead the shorter one in a trump contract but the longer one in no-trumps.



YOU are West on lead to 3NT. The bidding has been simple: South opened 1NT and North bid 3NT.

Your hand is:



Since Stayman has not been used, you decide to lead spades rather than clubs. You choose the three of spades, because our agreement is to lead the fourth

card down from the top, when leading from a long suit headed by an honour and without a sequence. When dummy goes down it looks to be a good choice:



Dummy plays the four of spades and partner wins with the ace, declarer playing the two. That is good news and it's even better when partner returns the nine of spades, declarer plays the ten and you win with your jack. What do you do now? As always, stop and think before you play a card.

Think about the high cards:

- You have 7 points, dummy has 12.
- Declarer has 12-14 points to open 1NT.
- Even if declarer has a maximum of 14, that still leaves 7 High-Card Points (HCP) for your partner.

Returning partner's suit

- If declarer has a minimum for 1NT, partner will have 9 HCP.
- Partner has already shown 4 HCP with the ace of spades, but that still leaves 3-5 HCP in partner's hand.

That means declarer does not have all the points you can't see, and is likely to have some work to do to come to nine tricks.

Plan your defence before playing to trick one

You should always do that simple sum when dummy goes down. Declarer should be thinking before playing to trick one and so should you! Knowing what you can expect partner to hold helps you plan the defence.

Think about the cards already played; so far eight spades have been played and you can see two more in your hand:



The three spades that you can't see are the queen, six and five. If South started with just three spades, that is $\triangle Q$ -10-2, you should play your spade king now and drop South's now bare spade queen. That is, you want the cards to be distributed like this, so you can cash four spade tricks:



But if South started with $\triangle Q$ -10-5-2, playing your king of spades will create a

spade trick for South and maybe give the contract. To make four spade tricks, you need partner to get the lead and play back his last spade:



Now both your king and eight of spades will win tricks.

Get a pack of cards and put out the spades in different ways to see how to maximise the tricks you can win. *But you do need to have an agreement with partner to solve the problem of what to play at trick three.* Our agreement is:

- If partner originally had three spades, partner returns the highest remaining spade. So with ♠ A-9-6 partner returns the ♠9.
- If partner originally had four or more spades, he returns his original fourth highest. So with ▲A-9-6-5, partner must return the five of spades. If partner has four spades, declarer must have started with ▲Q-10-2 and when you play your king of spades, declarer's queen will fall under the king and your fourth spade will be a winner.

Occasionally partner will have started with five spades, in which case the position after two rounds of spades is:



Now, when you cash the king of spades, declarer will show out and you can play your spade eight, overtaken by partner's queen to cash the fifth spade trick and get 3NT down.

Can this go wrong?

There is one time this agreement can go wrong, when the suit is distributed:



After two rounds of spades you have K-9 and declarer Q-8-5. If you cash the king, you give declarer a second spade trick.

Declarer won't have five spades very often, although some people do open 1NT with five spades. Finding declarer with five cards is more likely when the suit led is a minor. Consider this deal:



Against South's 3NT, you lead the three of clubs. East's ace wins the trick. If South carelessly plays the club two at trick one, East can tell that South started with *five* clubs and continuing clubs will set up winners for South. East should switch to the queen of hearts at trick two. Not returning clubs warns partner that there is a problem in the club suit. It does *not* say: 'I have some nice hearts and I want to play them!'

But when this hand was played, one declarer did something really clever. At trick one he played the club *five*. Now East thought West held the two of clubs and must have five clubs. So East returned the six of clubs, and West thought East had four clubs and cashed his club king, giving Ron two club tricks and the contract! West should have looked a bit harder at the small cards. Where is the two of clubs? If declarer has it, then he is trying to mislead the defenders.

PRIZE PLAY ANSWER



Prizes kindly donated by PIATNIK, makers of playing cards since 1824

QUIZ master Julian Pottage gives his view of the best line of play in our February competition and awards prizes in three categories.



West leads the ace of clubs and continues with the six of clubs. East follows once, ruffs the second club and exits with a trump. What is the best line for the contract?

You have lost two tricks already and must lose to the red aces. One idea is to play East for a doubleton ace of diamonds. Of course, this is not very likely given the club layout. Another idea is to draw trumps ending in hand and lead a low heart. If West has 10-x or J-x and foolishly starts a high-low, you can finesse the nine on the way back. There is a better line – to squeeze East in the red suits.

You should win the trump in dummy and ruff a club. Then return to dummy with a trump and ruff a club. Go back to dummy with a trump once more and play a fourth round of trumps. If East keeps three hearts and hence only two diamonds, you discard a heart. You then play a diamond to the queen and duck a diamond. If East prefers to keep three diamonds and two hearts, you discard a diamond. In this case you can set up two heart tricks.

How do you know whether East is keeping three hearts or three diamonds? The bidding and play to date tell you. West, who has had two chances to lead a heart, can hardly have a singleton heart. So East surely cannot have more than six hearts. West has also had the chance to raise hearts but again has failed to do so. So East cannot have fewer than six hearts and must have exactly six.

Congratulations to the winners:			
County:	John Turner Colliers Wood, London		
Regional:	Jeff Harrison Natland, Kendall		
Open:	W. Ellis Paignton		

This month's new **PIATNIK** Play Quiz is featured on page 41.

LATEST EBU REGULATION

APPARENTLY, at EBU tournaments some people have not been counting their cards before play, and others have been miscounting. Consequently the 12/14 card situation is arising frequently and is not discovered till the end of play, and hence adjusted scores are needed. The EBU Tournament Committee feel that if this could be eliminated it would mean a smoother running of competitions, and they have bought 100 sets of mini-size digital scales. One is put on each table and players are to weigh their cards in turn instead of counting them. A dedicated EBU employee has discovered that each playing card weighs about 2g and hence you can tell immediately if a hand is a card short or a card too many.

At significant expense, these scales have been adapted so that they show a green light if the hand has 13 cards, an orange light if a hand is a card short and a red light if you have a card too many. Also, the scales give a loud bleep if there is a wrong number of cards; when the bleep is heard, the TD descends. The scales are to be introduced from the start of this month. — *Ian Dalziel*





NOT everybody realises that you should not always lead the same card to a trump contract as you would lead to a no-trump contract. One of my maxims is: *Never underlead an ace against a suit contract – if you must lead that suit, lead the ace.* It's a good general rule that has very few exceptions. This deal came up only last week:



North opened 1NT and South bid 4. West was on lead and chose to lead a fourth-highest heart, the three. Whilst that would be a normal lead to 3NT, it is wrong against 4. as this deal shows. After winning the king of hearts, declarer made 4. losing one spade, one diamond and one club. The second table wasn't any better when West led a fourth-highest club. South won with the club ten and now didn't have a club loser; again 4. made.

At the third table West led the six of diamonds, hoping to get a diamond ruff. After winning with the ace, South led the queen of spades and finessed. West won and, hoping to get partner in for a diamond ruff, underlead the heart ace. But South won the king, drew trumps and ducked a diamond to East. This time South made eleven tricks.

Leading against suit contracts revisited

Only one West remembered my wise words about not underleading aces and led the club king. Now the defence could win a trick in each suit and 4 went one down.

But what clues are there that help West choose a lead?

Try counting points: West has 12 HCP; North has 12-14 HCP to open 1NT (expect North to have 13 HCP); South has bid game, so probably has at least 12 HCP. Together that makes about 37HCP, leaving around 3 HCP for East. So North-South have all the missing high cards except perhaps for the odd jack or queen. On a singleton lead, West will need to give East the lead to get a ruff and it's unlikely that East will have a suitable high card.

West should appreciate the need to set up some winners for the defence and lead a club. That brings in my second bit of good advice: Don't always lead the same card from a suit when leading to a trump contract as you would to a no-trump contract.

When leading against a no-trump contract, you often lead the fourth-highest card in a suit without a strong honour sequence. Even if you give a trick away with your lead, you might set up winners in your long suit. But when opponents are playing in a suit contract, they can use their trumps to ruff your winners, so you need to cash your tricks more quickly. Against 3NT West might lead the six of clubs, but against 4 West should lead the cub king.

I will change the deal a bit; suppose the auction went:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1 🛦
Pass	2	Pass	4
All Pass			

What card do you lead from this hand?

	A 6
•••	A 8 5 2
•	J 10
*	K Q 8 4 2

This time, you have 14 HCP, so can't expect anything useful from partner – at most a couple of points. Against 3NT you would lead the club four from this hand – partner might just produce the jack. In a spade contract, the third club might be ruffed, so you must be sure to take your winner while you can. Best is to lead the king of clubs; dummy goes down and partner plays the club nine at trick one.

When you win the ace of spades, you cash the queen of clubs and partner plays the six. Remember that on your king lead, our agreement is that partner will play an encouraging card if he likes the lead and does not want you to switch to another suit. So partner's play of the club nine followed by the club six could show either ♣J-9-6 or just a doubleton ♣9-6. In either case, partner is encouraging a continuation and it cannot hurt. You play a third club and partner ruffs. Your ace of hearts gets 4♠ one down.

The full deal was:



Since East has few points and opponents have stopped in game and not looked for a slam, East knows that West is likely to have some good high cards. There must be a reasonable chance that West holds either the ace or king of trumps, in which case East can score a club ruff.

Playing a high-low signal on partner's king lead against a suit contract is encouraging a continuation of that suit. You might have a useful high card, or you might have a doubleton and be hoping for a ruff.

Leads against slams

BIDDING to a making slam is not easy even for experienced players. Less experienced players find it difficult and some never even try. But slams are an exciting part of the game both for declarer and defenders, and neither side should panic when one comes along. Consider this auction:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
Pass	4NT	Pass	6NT

1NT shows 12-14 points. In Standard English Acol, a 4NT response to 1NT shows about 20-21 points and asks South to bid a slam holding a maximum 1NT. So with 14 points, or a good 13, South went to 6NT.

On the hand below, you are West; it's your lead.

٨	1098
¥	A 8 3 2
•	642
*	1098

Does the bidding give any clues? Are leads different

against slams?

Which card should you choose?

- The bidding does give you some clues about the North/South hands since North did not jump straight to 6NT.
- North, with 22 or more points, would know that North-South have at least 34 points between the two hands. With 34 or more points, North-South are missing at most two kings (or an ace and a queen). While slam isn't guaranteed, it should have a good play.
- 4NT over 1NT did not ask about aces (despite what many players think!). It asked South to bid a slam with a maximum 1NT, so South has shown 14, or a good 13, points to bid 6NT; with less South would pass 4NT.
- North did not use Stayman or bid a suit on the way to slam, so North has a fairly balanced hand.
- You have 4 points; partner is likely to have just 2 or possibly 3 points. You want to make sure your lead doesn't

kill the only potential trick in your partner's hand.

- Leads to 3NT aim to take five tricks. Against 6NT, we are hoping to take *two* tricks. So leads to slams are often different to leads to 3NT.
- You do not need to play out your ace of hearts at trick one. Since both North and South have balanced hands, our heart trick won't disappear.

Against 3NT you would lead the two of hearts, fourth highest of your longest suit. You would be hoping to set up length tricks in hearts. But that would be wrong against 6NT, where you only need to make two tricks. Against a slam we often choose a passive lead, one that doesn't give declarer a trick. Let declarer struggle to find twelve tricks!

So what card should you lead from the hand above?

I would choose one of my 10-9-8 holdings. If North has a longer suit, it is more likely to be a minor than a major, so I would choose the ten of spades.

Now look at the full deal (next column).

Cover the East-West hands and plan how you, as South, would play 6NT on the ten of spades lead. Remember to do a SWOT (= assess your <u>Strengths</u>, <u>W</u>eaknesses, <u>Opportunities</u>, and <u>Threats</u>) before you touch a card.





First count your tricks: four spades, four diamonds and three clubs. Only hearts can provide the twelfth trick, so you have to decide where the ace of hearts is! The contract can be made. South leads the jack of hearts from dummy; if East plays the four, South has a guess – and if South does *not* play the king of hearts, 6NT makes.

If West leads the ace of hearts at trick one, or if West leads the fourth-highest two of hearts, then South has no guess in hearts and 6NT always makes.

YOUNG CHELSEA'S ANNIVERSARY 'PLAY WITH AN INTERNATIONAL' PAIRS

A 'Play with an International' event was organised as part of the Young Chelsea Bridge Club's 40th anniversary celebrations. The club has more than forty International members and twenty-six of them were invited (and agreed) to play in a special pairs event. They have represented nine different countries and ten of them are World and/or European Champions. A raffle was held to select their partners on May 8th, the actual anniversary date, and over £800 was raised for the Alzheimer's Society, the charity chosen for the YC's anniversary year.

The event itself was played on May 15th and the leading positions were: 1. Cameron Small – Fiona Hutchison 65.7%, 2. Andrew Robson – Tim Gauld 59.1%, 3. David and Heather Bakhshi 57.7%, 4. Nicola Smith – Catherine Cardyn 56.7%.

Opener's rebid: raising partner's 2NT response to 1NT to 3NT

YOU are South and open the bidding with 1♥, partner responds 1♠. What do you rebid? Your hand is:

🔺 K J 6
💙 A K 5 2
🔶 J 7
♣ J 6 4 3

Of course this is a trick question. You would never

open $1 \checkmark$ with this hand. Holding a balanced 12-14 points, you should always open 1NT. If you opened $1 \checkmark$ and partner responded $2 \diamondsuit$, what would you rebid? Having opened 1NT you won't have to make a further bid unless partner asks you to do so, by asking a question. One question your partner might ask is: 'Are you a maximum or a minimum for your 1NT opening bid?' Partner asks this question by bidding 2NT.

On the hand shown you might find this a difficult question to answer. With 13 points you are in the middle of the point range for 1NT. The hand has nothing very exciting about it, so many players would pass. Others might see two four-card suits in which tricks could be developed and they would bid game, or perhaps they are more confident about their card playing abilities and like being in game! There isn't really a correct answer; on the day, either pass or 3NT could be right.

Below is a quiz. There are eight possible 1NT opening bids. Partner raises you to 2NT; would you bid 3NT or would you pass? Decide on your answers before reading what I would do.

(1)	(2)
♠ K 6 5	♠ J 9
♥ 9 5 4 2	♥ A Q 9 2
♦ Q 4 2	♦ K Q 10 9
♣ A Q J	♣ J 10 8
(3)	(4)
▲ Q 3	♠ K 3
♥ A Q 4 2	♥ A Q 4 2
◆ K Q 3 2	♦ K Q 10 9
♣ 8 6 4	♣ 10 8 6

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

(1) This is a really miserable 1NT opening bid, with only 12 points. Also, the heart suit has no honours. The clubs may only provide two tricks. It doesn't get much worse than this. Not only would I pass 2NT, I might pass the hand rather than opening it! (2) A 13-point hand, but two four-card suits with good honour holdings, where I might develop tricks, plus two tens and three nines, which strengthen the suits. I might not make 3NT, but I would always bid it.

(3) This 13-point hand looks much like (2), but it's not as strong. No tens or nines in the long suits. It wouldn't be wrong to bid 3NT, but I would pass 2NT.

(4) With 14 points and two tens everybody should bid 3NT. On a spade lead, the spade king is always a stopper, where a holding of AQ-3 would not be. Opponents often lead your shortest suit to set up tricks. Partner is unlikely to have four spades as he didn't use Stayman over the 1NT opening.

(5) With 15 points, this hand is too good for 1NT. But if you miscounted your points when you made your first bid and opened 1NT, you should certainly bid 3NT now.

(6) Only 12 points, but the four tens improve the hand. Some people count a ten as half a point, so four tens could be worth 2 points on that reckoning! With a strong five-card club suit to generate tricks, I would always rebid 3NT on this hand.

(7) Pass: you have a minimum hand. Note that you are not obliged to pass initially just because you only have 11 points. I would



open 1NT with that good five-card diamond suit, despite being a point short. I prefer to open 1NT rather than $1 \blacklozenge$ as 1NT is a limit bid: I won't have to bid again unless partner forces me. If I open $1 \blacklozenge$, I have to make a rebid unless partner raises diamonds or bids 1NT. 1NT makes life awkward for opponents – they can't overcall at the one level over 1NT – but it's easy to overcall with a major over $1 \blacklozenge$.

(8) Pass or bid on – see (3) – but the point is that you should open with 1NT. If you open 1 \bigstar and partner replies with a suit bid at the two level, you are obliged to make a rebid. I would hate to have to rebid 2 \bigstar with that poor suit. Although in principle an opening 1NT bid denies a five-card major, I make an exception with a very poor suit.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A 1NT opening bid is a 'limit' bid, i.e. you do not have to bid again unless partner makes a forcing response.
- A 1NT opening bid can contain any strength five-card minor or a weak five-card major.
- When you open the bidding with one of a suit, you are obliged to make a rebid unless partner passes, raises your suit or bids no trumps, or if partner is a passed hand. Consider what that rebid will be when you decide on your opening bid. If you can't think of a rebid, it probably means you should open 1NT!
- When evaluating your 1NT opening, count half a point for a ten, if it is supporting a higher honour.
- If your card play is not yet very good, you may get a good score by staying in 2NT when the confident players are in 3NT going down!

Responder's action when opener rebids 1NT

WHEN partner opens with a bid of one of a suit and then rebids 1NT, you, as responder, are in charge of guiding your side to the final contract. Partner's 1NT is a 'limit bid': it shows a precise number of points. Standard English suggests 15-16 but some people play 15-17; it doesn't matter which you play as long as you and your partner agree. Partner hasn't much idea how strong your hand is, only that you have at least 6 points, so it's up to you to lead your partnership to a safe contract. Suppose your hand is as shown, and the

▲ Q 10 9 5
💙 J 4
🔶 A K J 10 9
♣ J 7

auction has begun with 1 & from partner, 1 from you, and partner rebids 1NT.

What do you know about partner's hand? Since partner didn't

open 1NT, partner is fairly balanced and better than 12-14 points. Partner must have four or five clubs to open 1♣, but will not have four cards in either hearts or spades, because 1NT was rebid over 1♠. So there is no point in bidding your spades after the 1NT rebid – partner does not have four spades. You have 12 high-card points and some useful tens too; partner has at least 15 points, so your side has a combined count of 27 points. As 27 points is enough for game, you can just raise partner to 3NT. Don't give the opponents any clues about your hand, just bid 3NT and hope partner can make at least nine tricks.

But there are times when you want to explore alternative contracts. 3NT is not always the best place to play. Suppose partner opens $1 \checkmark$ and you respond $1 \bigstar$. What would you say on the following hands when partner rebids 1NT?

(1)	(2)
▲ K 6 5 3	▲ K Q 10 9 6 5
♥ Q 5 4 2	♥ 9 2
♦ J 4	◆ K Q 10 8
♣ A K 3	♣ 3

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

(1) You should never be in this position. When partner opens $1 \checkmark$, you will raise hearts by saying $4 \checkmark$. When you have a fit in one major, you don't need to find a fit in the other one. So there is no point in responding $1 \diamondsuit$, just support hearts.

(2) You want to be in game with this exciting shape hand. Partner should have at least two small spades, so your side has an eight-card spade fit. Just bid 4. Don't mess about when you know where you are going.

(3) With only five spades, this hand is one trick weaker than Hand 2, but it has the ♥Q instead, so with 12 points you still want to go to game. Will spades be better? Probably, if partner has three – maybe not if partner has only two small spades. Bid 3 ◆. A new suit at the three level is forcing to game. It asks opener to bid game in spades with three-card support, otherwise 3NT. It doesn't show any real interest in playing in diamonds. If opener had five hearts and four diamonds, he would have rebid 2 ◆ not 1NT.

(4) Partner could have five hearts. A hand with 15 points and a five-card heart suit



would prefer to rebid 1NT rather than $2\heartsuit$. So perhaps hearts would play better than no-trumps. Bid $3\clubsuit$ to offer a choice of games. With five cards in hearts partner will bid $4\clubsuit$. With only four hearts, but with three spades, partner will bid $3\clubsuit$. But with a hand that has only two spades and four hearts, partner will bid 3NT. You can pass happily knowing that all possible game contracts have been investigated.

(5) This is a much less exciting shape hand than the previous ones. But you do have 9 points. Try for game by bidding 2NT. If partner has five cards in hearts, he can bid 3♥ over 2NT to show his five-card suit, allowing you to choose which game to play.

(6) You responded $1 \triangleq$ to $1 \checkmark$ to make sure a 4-4 spade fit wasn't missed. Some people would respond $2 \blacklozenge$, bidding their long suit first. But if partner just rebids $2 \checkmark$, you are not worth bidding again with $2 \clubsuit$ and a 4-4 spade fit could be lost. When partner rebids 1NT, those long diamonds look to be a useful source of tricks and I would raise 1NT directly to 3NT.

(7) With only 6 points, you have no interest in game. But maybe with your shapely hand a suit contract will be better. Bid $2 \blacklozenge$, which partner can pass if he prefers diamonds to spades. With equal length in spades and diamonds, partner can put you back to spades by bidding $2 \blacklozenge$.

(8) Sorry if I caught you out, but with 14 points you have a good hand and should respond 2 ◆ to partner's 1 ♥ opening, not 1 ♠. Partner will probably rebid 2NT. Now you can show your four cards in spades by bidding 3 ♠. This is called a 'Responder's Reverse', which in Standard English is forcing to game: partner is not allowed to pass over 3 ♠.

Responding to an opening 2 & bid

ONLY a few times each year are we dealt an amazingly strong hand – so strong that we expect to make game, even if our partner is very, very weak. Naturally we want to let partner know the good news. In return we want partner to tell us about the few bits and pieces he has in his hand. We use an opening bid of 2.4 to convey the good news and to ask a question. 2.4 says nothing about opener's clubs, it just says: 'I have a great hand and we are going to game and possibly even to slam. Tell me about your hand'.

After partner has opened 2, you must reply even if holding no high cards at all. So responding to 2, may show no enthusiasm, no points, not even a long suit. But however poor the hand you have been dealt as responder, you must not pass a 2. opening – remember, opener may not have any clubs at all, just a very strong hand. With a poor hand that does not include useful high cards, responder bids 2 and that can lead to the only sequence which is not forcing to game: 2, -2 – 2NT.

If opener rebids 2NT over responder's $2 \blacklozenge$, it shows 23-24 points, a bit stronger than a 2NT opening bid. With 0-2 points, responder can pass 2NT, but must find another bid with 3 or more points. In response to the 2NT rebid, the bidding continues just as though 2NT had been the opening bid. So $3\clubsuit$ over a 2NT rebid is Stayman, you can play transfers if that is

your normal system and a raise to 3NT probably has one useful card.

Responses to an opening 2.

See table below.

Practise replying to partner's 24 opening

 (1) ▲ 4 3 ♥ 6 5 4 ♦ 7 6 5 ♣ 8 6 4 3 2 	(2) ▲ A Q 4 3 2 ♥ K 10 4 ◆ 7 6 5 ♣ 8 3
(3)	(4)
▲ J 5 4 3 2	♠ 9 7 6 4
♥ Q 10 7	♥ J 8 7 2
◆ Q J 8	♦ J 6
♣ A 3	♣ Q J 3
(5)	(6)
▲ 9 7	▲ 4 2
♥ Q 10 7 2	♥ K Q J 10 7 2
♦ A J 8	♦ 9 8
♣ A Q 10 9	♣ K 8 4

(1) Tempting as it is to pass, 2 + demands that you find a bid. Even with this Yarborough and a feeling that 2 + is already too high, you must respond 2 +. And if partner rebids 2 = or 2 +, say 2NT. You

RESPONSES TO AN OPENING 2*		
BID MEANING		
2 ♦	Fewer than 8 points, nothing to do with diamonds.	
2♥/2♠/3♣/3♦	A positive response, forcing to game, with a five-card suit headed by two high honours or a longer suit with one top honour.	
2NT	8 or more points, fairly balanced. May have a poor five-card suit. May be very strong. Remember you are forced to game.	
3♥/3♠/4♣/4♦	A solid suit of at least six cards. Opener should be happy to play in this suit with only one or two small cards in support.	
3NT upward	Not used (except 4*/4*) as these bids take up too much space.	



must keep the bidding open till game is reached but 2NT shows a very poor hand.

(2) This hand is well worth the positive response of $2 \clubsuit$. If opener continues with $3\clubsuit$ or $3 \blacklozenge$, bid 3NT. Since partner has a strong hand, you don't need to have stoppers in all the suits to bid 3NT. If partner bids 2NT, bid 3NT and if partner bids $3 \clubsuit$, raise to $4 \clubsuit$. But if partner raises spades, you can bid $4 \clubsuit$ as a cue-bid, showing first- or second-round control in hearts.

(3) With 10 points this hand is worth a positive response. Even though you have five spades, they are not headed by good honours and it is best to treat the spades like a four-card suit. Bid 2NT which is forcing to game. If partner bids $3 \clubsuit$ or $3 \diamondsuit$ bid $3 \clubsuit$. If partner bids $3 \clubsuit$, raise to $4 \heartsuit$.

(4) Bid 2♦. If partner now bids a major, raise to game to prevent him looking for a slam. If partner rebids 2NT, bid 3♣ Stayman to see if he has a four-card major.

(5) Bid 2NT. This hand is huge opposite a 2^{*} opening. With 13 points, we must be able to make a slam, but start quietly by responding 2NT showing a balanced hand with 8+ points. If you get stuck for a bid, you can always raise partner's suit to slam or bid 6NT. By taking it slowly, you may be able to bid a grand slam with confidence.

(6) Bid 2♥. Whilst you have a great heart suit, partner may have opened 2♣ with a spade/diamond two-suiter and your cards will then be less useful. So take it slowly. Give partner a chance to bid his suit and then you can rebid your hearts. When this hand occurred, the final contract was 7♣. Your hearts proved useless as partner was void, but your clubs enabled spade and diamond losers to be ruffed.

From Strong Twos to Weak Two bids

IN the early versions of Standard English, to open the bidding at the two level was to make a strong bid, forcing for one round and showing one or two good suits with good high-card points. Here are two hands taken from *Really Easy Bidding*, where the topic is discussed more fully:



This one-suited hand has five spade tricks, two more in hearts and one club trick. With good points, shape and eight tricks, open 2. Partner

must respond to 2. If partner bids 2NT, rebid 3. If partner bids anything else, our side is forced to game.



With 6-5 in the majors, open 2♠. If partner responds 2NT, rebid 3♥. With no fit for either major partner just rebids 3♠. After any other res-

ponse, the side is forced to game.

You can't actually guarantee game with either of these hands, but you would like to show partner your strong suits to decide which suit to play in. An opening bid of $2 \bigstar$ is forcing for *one* round. That is, partner must respond and with a poor hand should give the negative response of 2NT. This allows you to rebid $3 \bigstar$ on the first hand (showing at least a six-card spade suit) or $3 \checkmark$ on the second (showing a strong two-suiter).

Playing Strong Twos, an opening bid of $2 \diamondsuit$, $2 \checkmark$ or $2 \bigstar$ shows:

- a good suit of at least five cards and often longer;
- a hand where with reasonable breaks we can count at least eight playing tricks;
- a strong hand with high cards, usually in the 18 to 23 point range.

The early developers of the Acol system decided to play Two bids as described earlier, with an artificial opening 2⁺ as the only game-forcing bid. Acol Two bids are great for describing these good hands, but they don't come up very often, so many players have adopted Weak Twos in diamonds, hearts and spades, with only 2⁺ retaining its original strong meaning. Actually Weak Twos are nothing new and were invented as long ago as 1925. At that time all opening Two bids in a suit were natural and forcing to game, a system rarely played nowadays.

Like Weak Threes, Weak Twos are mostly aimed at disrupting the opponents' auction. Opponents lose their normal opening bids and are forced to enter the auction at a higher level. If opponents do win the contract, partner is helped with the opening lead.

A typical Weak Two bid has about 6-10 points and a six-card suit. Your hand shape will normally be 6-3-2-2 or 6-3-3-1, but you might be 6-4-2-1 or 6-4-3-0 if the four card suit is a minor. If partner hasn't passed, it's good to have a suit which contains one or two of the top three honours, or three of the top five honours, as this will help partner decide whether to try for game with a good hand. If partner has passed and you are third in hand, you can ignore these rules. Note, however, that in fourth seat, after three passes, you should play Strong Twos as now you are no longer preempting the opponents.

Playing Weak Twos, an opening bid of 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ shows:

- a suit of six cards headed by at least one top honour card;
- a hand without four cards in any unbid major;
- a hand of 6-10 points, not worth a one level opening.

In first seat at Love All, which of the following hands would you open with a Weak Two?



Hand 1 ♠ A Q 8 ♥ J 10 5 ♦ Q 6 5 ♣ Void	642 4	Hand 2 ♠ J 8 5 ♥ 9 3 ♦ A K 5 ♣ 8 3	4 3 2 5
Hand 3 ▲ K J 10 ♥ 7 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ 8 3	832 5	Hand 4 ▲ A K (♥ 8 2 ◆ J 9 8 ♣ 3	2 8 4 2 2
	Hand 3 ▲ 4 2 ♥ K Q ◆ 5 2 ♣ 9 6	5 10987 4	

(1) You could open $2 \bigstar$, the spade suit is just right. But if you do, you could find partner has heart length and your side has missed a game in hearts. If you swop your heart and club holdings, though, so that you are void in hearts, open $2 \bigstar$.

(2) Again you could open 2▲ but the suit has very poor honours; partner will expect better. However. if opponents are vulnerable and you are third in hand nonvulnerable, after two passes, open 2▲ as the hand appears to belong to the opposition.
(3) I would open 2▲, even if vulnerable.
(4) You are too good for opening 2▲ first in hand when not vulnerable. With that strong spade suit and good shape, open 1▲ first in hand, but 2▲ in third seat.

(5) I said a Weak Two shows 6-10 points, but I would open this hand 2Ψ as the suit is so good. An extra jack in one of the other suits wouldn't make the hand any better.

In my next article I will discuss how the auction can develop after a Weak Two opening. □

Responding to a Weak Two opening

LAST time I described Weak Two opening bids. Here is the summary:

Playing Weak Twos an opening bid of $2 \diamondsuit, 2 \heartsuit$ or $2 \bigstar$ shows:

- A suit of six cards headed by at least one top honour card.
- A hand without four cards in any unbid major.
- A hand of 6-10 points, not worth a one-level opening.

In fourth seat, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ are Strong not Weak Twos.

An opening bid of 2, is always game forcing (except the sequence 2, -2, -2, -2, -2, NT).

Responding to a Weak Two opening

▲ 10 8 6 4
♥ 5
◆ A Q J 10 9 7
♣ K 5

Often when partner opens a Weak Two you will pass. You don't have to bid just because you don't like partner's suit. If partner

opens $2 \checkmark$, on this hand you should *pass*. Your diamonds may be better than partner's hearts, but to bid $3 \diamondsuit$ would be forcing and you don't want to go to game. But what if partner opens $2 \bigstar$? Now you do want to bid because you have a good fit with partner. You might just bid $3 \bigstar$ but I would go to $4 \bigstar$. Perhaps it will keep the opponents out of a making game or maybe $4 \bigstar$ will make. Either way it's a winning bid.

♦ 9 5 4
♥ K 10 8 3
♦ 3
♣ A K 9 3 2

Your partner opens a weak 2♥, the next hand passes; what do you respond? Don't count your points; look instead at your play-

ing strength. Just bid 4♥. Game won't always make if your side has to lose a

diamond and three black cards, but it often will. And if it doesn't make, it is likely that your opponents can make a contract, quite possibly a game, so $4 \checkmark$ is a two-way bid: it may make life difficult for your opponents or it may get your side to a good game.



When your hand is weak, you would like to make life more difficult for opponents, but vulnerable you may be nervous of jump-

ing to game. If partner opens 2, and the next player passes, a bid of 3 is an attempt to disrupt the auction. Fourth hand now has to decide if his side should be playing at the four level.

The 2NT reply and subsequent development

What should you do with a serious game or slam try? The response of 2NT is used as an asking bid. Some players like to use conventional responses to 2NT, but in Standard English we use fairly simple replies, which are helpful and easier to remember.

Say you open 2^A, partner bids 2NT. Your replies:

- 3 Rebid your suit to decline the game try.
- 3. / Show a useful holding
- $3 \blacklozenge /$ in the suit and
- **3♥** a maximum hand.
- 3NT Shows a solid or nearly solid suit, say ♠A-K-Q-x-x-x, ♠A-K-J-x-x-x or ♠A-Q-J-10-x-x. Partner's values will be outside spades, but 3NT may be the best contract, with the lead coming up to partner's hand.
- 4 Shows a maximum, good spades and a shapely hand.

Examples

Decide how the bidding should go before you look at my comments.





West opens a Weak $2 \blacklozenge$. If East-West have six diamond tricks, East's hand is likely to produce three more, so East should bid 3NT. Nine tricks make easily on a spade lead for +600; $2 \diamondsuit / 3 \blacklozenge$ scores only +110.



East has a maximum 2♥ opening, so when West enquires with 2NT, East rebids 3♣. West uses Blackwood to check on aces and when East shows two, he bids 6♥ which makes twelve tricks if the heart finesse loses.

Summary	of Responses:
Pass	May be quite strong in
	terms of points but no
	fit.
Raise to 3	Not forcing, pre-emptive.
Raise to game	Strong or shut-out.
New suit	Encouraging at the two-
	level, game forcing if at a
	higher level.
2NT	Forcing enquiry, asking
	about strength
3NT	To play; opener must pass.
4NT	As you normally play.

When opponents open a Weak Two

NOT only your side, but your opponents, can play Weak Twos. So you and your partner should know how to defend against Weak Two openings, even if you don't play them.

Defending in second seat

Decide on your second-in-hand action with each of the hands below.

Suppose your Right-hand opponent opens a weak $2 \clubsuit$. You are next to speak. Are you worth making a bid, and if so, what should it be?

Hand 1	Hand 2
♠ 6 2	♠ 6
♥ Q J 10 4	♥ K Q 10 6 4 2
♦ A K 9	♦ A J 10
♣ A Q 8 7	♣ Q 9 3
Hand 3	Hand 4
♠ Void	♠ A J 9
♥ K Q J 10 6 4 2	♥ A Q
♠ A J 2	♦ K Q 9 8 6
♣ Q J 10	♣ Q J 8
Hand 5	Hand 6
♠ A J	♠ A J
♥ K	♥ A K 2
♦ A K Q 9 8 6 3	♦ A K Q J 3
♣ Q J 8	♣ J 7 4
Hand 7	Hand 8

There are various defences to weak two openings. I use simple methods, which are consistent with Standard English normal defensive methods.

Hand 1

If your RHO opened 1, you would make a take-out double, asking partner to respond in his best suit at an appropriate level. If RHO opens 2, you can still double for take-out but partner, with a minimum hand. will have to respond at the three level, so don't get too excited when you hear the stronger sounding response of, say, 3^(*) from partner. Clubs is his best suit but he may have few values.

Hand 2

Over a weak 2^{\bullet} , you should overcall 3^{\checkmark} . You don't really want to push your side to the three level, but you are too good to pass. If your side should be playing in hearts, you must be the one to bid them.

Hand 3

Compare this hand with the last one. Over a weak $2 \bigstar$, $3 \checkmark$ doesn't do justice to your values. Although you cannot see where ten tricks are coming from, you should jump to $4 \checkmark$ and hope partner can produce something useful.

Hand 4

Overcall 2NT which shows about 16-19 HCP. Partner responds as he would over a 2NT opening bid.

Hand 5

Bid 3NT though it's not exactly the textbook hand! You are too strong for $3 \blacklozenge$ and to make eleven tricks in $5 \blacklozenge$ would need some help from partner. There is no certainty that partner will hold a card that gives the ninth trick in 3NT, but at least you shouldn't go more than one down if partner has nothing useful!

Hand 6

On the last hand you bid 3NT on an unusual shape. When you are fairly balanced with lots of points, start with a double and bid 3NT next time. Doubling first allows other contracts to be explored. If LHO raises $2 \ge 10^{-4}$, you should double again, for penalties.

Hand 7

Over a weak 2 opening, you should pass. What you hope is that 2 is passed round to partner. Maybe he will double for takeout and you can convert the take-out double to a penalty double by passing.



Hand 8

You would have opened this hand with a weak 1NT but it is not good enough enter the auction at the two or three level. Just pass and wait to see what happens.

Defending in fourth seat

It's not only second in hand that can have problems deciding what action to take, sometimes the weak two opening is passed round to the player in fourth seat. When this happens it is reasonable to assume that third in hand hasn't got a big fit with partner or they would have jumped to game. It is possible that your second-inhand partner has values in the suit opened. *If you have shortage in opener's suit, always consider re-opening with a take-out double.* Your partner may be able to convert your take-out double to a penalty double by passing.

Practise your defence

You will need to practice your defence to weak two openings. They don't come up that often, so here is a practice idea. In my April article, I gave this hand as a typical weak two opening:



Make up this hand and then deal the remaining thirty-nine cards into three piles. You take one dealt hand and partner takes another. Decide

how you would bid after a Weak Two opening. Then check your final contract and decide whether it is a good one. Redeal the cards and repeat the process. It is a good way to practice any defensive method when you don't have any opponents to play against. \Box

Weak Three openings

I HAVE been looking at Weak Two openings in some detail, but how does playing Weak Twos affect weak three-level openings? Usually the answer is not at all! Weak Twos in diamonds, hearts and spades show *six*-card suits, while Weak Threes show *seven* cards in the suit bid. The suit is a card longer because you are opening the bidding a level higher and so need a trick more. While preemptive openings are intended to disrupt the opponents' bidding, be aware that partner could have a good hand and needs to have some idea of what you might hold.

Here are some suggestions to help you decide whether to open at the three level:

- Watch the vulnerability. It's often right to go two or three down when not vulnerable, particularly if you are not doubled, but one down vulnerable is usually enough – going two down and losing 200 is so often a poor result. How good a score you get for going down depends on what your opponents can make. A bit of intuition might be needed to guess what opponents might do.
- The considerations vary according to the position you are in. First in hand, your pre-empt can cause problems for both opponents. When you are second in hand, one opponent has already passed, so your pre-empt can only work against the other opponent. Third in hand, you know partner and one opponent couldn't bid, so you stand a good chance of upsetting the opening bid of the fourth-hand player, who probably has the strongest hand at the table.
- Most players play take-out doubles of a three-level opening. Remember though, that your opening could be doubled for take-out by one player, who is short in your suit, and passed for penalties by the other opponent, who has length in your suit.
- If partner has not yet passed, he may have a good hand and not appreciate your pre-emptive effort. So, facing an unpassed partner, it's usually wrong to pre-empt in one major if you have a good holding in the other major.

Rule of 500

When considering whether to open with a pre-empt the Rule of 500 can be used. This says that if your contract is doubled, you would not expect to lose more than 500 points, that is you should not be going more than three down not vulnerable or two down vulnerable.

What do you open?

Here are some hands with long suits. You are not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents. You are first to speak. Decide what, if anything, you would you open.

Hand 1 ♠ 4 ♥ KQJ9752 ♦ 10932 ♣ 8	Hand 2
Hand 3	Hand 4
♠ Q J 9	♠ A K Q 9 8 6 2
♥ J 8 7 6 5 4 2	♥ 7
♦ A 8	♦ J 10 9 7
♣ 2	♣ 3
Hand 5	Hand 6

Does it make a difference if you are in second, third, or fourth position? Would you make a different bid if vulnerable?

(1) 3♥. Your hand has six likely heart tricks and possibly one diamond. Not vulnerable you will go at most three down. I would probably open 3♥ vulnerable too, but it's a bit more risky.

(2) Pass in first or second but open 3♥ in third seat. Try not to pre-empt with a good holding in the other major, unless partner is a passed hand.

(3) Pass. The hearts are too weak and you don't want them led. Some players might



try 3♥ when they are not vulnerable and the opponents are. You have good defensive values. A Weak Three is dubious even if partner has passed. But there are no certainties, 3♥ could be a winner!

(4) 4. You are far too good to open at the three level, so its $1 \triangleq$ or $4 \triangleq$ and I prefer to bid up and hope for the best. You should not go more than two down even if partner has nothing. And you shouldn't lose more than 500 even if doubled and vulnerable.

(5) 2♠. With only six spades, prefer a weak two opening.

(6) 3♣. You can't open a weak 2♣ (remember it's your only strong opening bid). You want partner to find a club lead in defence if the opponents bid. So I would open 3♣ and hope for the best.

Weak Three opening in fourth seat

Clearly, if there are three passes around to you there is no need to pre-empt to shut the opponents out. You can always pass and throw the hand in, which stops them bidding. On the other hand, there are occasions where your opponents have both passed and yet can make a part-score and, occasionally, game. An opponent who has passed may come in with an overcall at the one level. One of the most annoying things is to open in fourth and find that your opponents bid a making game, thinking they are saving against your game!

So a Weak Three bid is a stronger opening bid in fourth seat and in a minor it will show a fairly solid suit – partner could perhaps bid 3NT with a near-opening bid and stoppers in the other three suits. Or maybe partner has a fit for your major and has shortages elsewhere, and can raise three of your major to four.

High-level pre-empts

IN previous articles I have looked at opening with weak bids at the two or three levels, but of course there is nothing to stop you opening at the four, five, six or even seven levels. No, I have never actually opened with a bid of six or seven, but I may get the hand one day!

Opening at the four or five level

Suppose you pick up a hand with nine hearts, for example

	Void
Ŧ	Volu
. 💙	K Q J 10 7 5 4 3 2
•	Void
*	J 10 8 6

This hand will make at least eight heart tricks and probably one club, so 4♥ should go at most one

down even if partner produces absolutely nothing useful. But your hand probably has no defensive tricks if the opponents play in spades or diamonds, so it's not impossible for opponents to have a contract, perhaps even a grand slam, in spades or diamonds. You should open 4. You can't guess whether this is a making contract but it will certainly set your opponents a problem!

An opening bid at the four or five level might be made on a very nearly solid suit, say:



You can't guess what can be made either by your side or the opponents', but even vulnerable I would open

5, hoping to give everybody a problem; 5, would probably go two down. Even if you are vulnerable, you will be losing at most 500, but only if the opponents double and choose to defend. Doubling won't be so easy for either opponent, since neither is likely to have a diamond trick..

One of my students was arguing that this hand has nine playing tricks and therefore was worth opening at the two level with a strong 2^{4} . But a two-level strong opening should not only contain a

decent suit with at least eight playing tricks, *it also has to be a hand of power and quality with defensive values as well as tricks in a long suit.* If opponents choose to overcall, it is highly likely that one of them will have a void in diamonds and your hand won't take even one trick.

Test hands

When we open with a weak two bid, it is normally made on a six-card suit. A weak three shows a seven-card suit. So it is not unreasonable to consider a four-level opening with an eight-card suit and a fivelevel opening with a nine-card suit. That is, each extra card in your long suit is worth one extra trick when you are playing in that suit.

What would you open first in hand on these hands? Would being vulnerable affect your choice?

Hand 1	Hand 2 ▲ 8 ♥ AKQJ10853 ◆ 2 ♣ J82
Hand 3	Hand 4
Hand 5	Hand 6
Hand 7 ▲ AK8763 ♥ Q 1098 ♦ 7 ♣ 92	Hand 8

My answers may not be the same as yours, but discuss these hands with your partner



and decide how daring you want to be with your pre-emptive openings.

- 1. Not vulnerable, 4♥. Perhaps only 3♥ vulnerable.
- 2. 4♥. You have eight certain tricks at any vulnerability even if partner has no useful cards.
- 3. 5♦ at any vulnerability. You must make nine tricks and probably ten. Game could be making if partner produces an ace.
- 4. 4♠. Could be lay-down if partner has a useful card in diamonds.
- 5. This hand is too good to pre-empt. In a future article, I will discuss an alternative opening on this hand. For now choose between 1♣ or 5♣!
- 6. It is 100% certain that 4♠ will make but you are too good to pre-empt. An opening bid of a game-forcing 2♠ may perhaps allow you to discover whether partner has any useful cards in hearts.
- 7. 1♠. I wouldn't consider trying 2♠ with four cards in the other major.
- 8. 3♣. It's only a seven-card suit, not good enough for a higher bid. □



The Gambling **3NT**

IN my articles last year, I looked at suit opening bids from the one to the five level, but so far haven't considered how best to use no trump bids as pre-empts. An opening 2NT shows 20 - 22 HCP. An opening bid of Two Clubs followed by a 2NT rebid shows 23-24 points. And Two Clubs followed by 3NT shows 25-27. Just once in my life I had 29 points in a balanced hand, I opened Two Clubs and rebid a natural 4NT - partner had nothing but I just managed ten tricks!

So, with all those ways to show strong balanced hands that have lots of points, we don't need an opening 3NT as an even stronger opening bid. Many players use it to show at least seven cards in a solid minor suit, with almost nothing in the other three suits, at most a queen or jack. It's called the gambling 3NT because you are gambling that partner has the stoppers, if you have the tricks. So it's up to partner to pass 3NT with some stoppers in the other three suits or to remove to our minor with only a few high card values. For example, in my last article you held:

≜] 7 **Y**] 9 • 6 🕭 A K Q J 9 7 6 4

We had to choose between 1♣ and 5. But opening 3NT gives partner a clear idea of what to expect. You have a

hand with seven or eight cards in clubs, but practically nothing outside, except perhaps an odd jack. The example shown is about the best hand opener is likely to have. If you only had seven solid clubs, say the ♦4 instead of the ♣4, you can still open 3NT.

Test your responding

If second hand passes partner's 3NT opening, what would you respond with the following hands? Make up your mind before you look at my suggestions.

Just remember that partner's minor is probably longer and stronger than any suit you hold. It's a requirement for opening 3NT that the suit is solid and at least seven cards in length!

Hand 1	Hand 2 ♠ A K Q 2 ♥ A K 6 5 ♦ 9 ♣ K Q 5 2
Hand 3	Hand 4
▲ A 7 6 2	♠ Q 7 5
♥ A 6 5 3	♥ J 10 8 4 3 2
♦ 9	♦ 9 4
♣ J 10 5 2	♣ 6 5
Hand 5	Hand 6
▲ K Q J 10 9 7 5 2	♠ A 6 4
♥ Void	♥ 2
♦ 10 4 2	♦ 10 9 4 2
♣ 9 8	♣ 10 8 7 6 3
Hand 7	Hand 8 ▲ A K 8 5 ♥ A J 9 3 ♦ A K 8 ▲ 5 3

1. Pass. You have stoppers in the other three suits. Seven diamonds in partner's hand plus your two aces should mean nine easy tricks. Don't even consider bidding 4♥!

2. 6NT. You were just wondering what to open with your 21 points and partner has made your bid very obvious. Partner has at least seven diamond tricks and you have five more tricks in the majors. Your only loser is the club ace and opponents will do best if they cash it at trick one so you can claim the rest.

3. Pass. Two aces plus at least seven diamonds means nine tricks. At worst opponents can cash three top clubs. If they do. 3NT makes ten tricks.

4. 4. With practically no stoppers in the other three suits, you want to play in partner's minor. But you don't know whether partner has solid clubs or diamonds. A bid of 4th asks partner to pass with long clubs or to bid $4 \blacklozenge$ with long solid diamonds.



Sandra Landy

This is known as 'Pass or Correct'. Bids of 5 \bigstar , 6 \bigstar , or even 7 \bigstar are played in the same way. If you don't want to include this option in your responses, you may find yourself having to guess which minor partner holds.

5. 4. You don't know if partner holds diamonds or clubs but for certain your opponents have lots of heart tricks to cash and playing in spades with this strong suit makes sense. 4♥ and 4♠ are natural bids over a 3NT opening, telling partner to pass even if void in your suit.

6. 5**♣**. Opponents surely can make game, and quite possibly a slam, in a major suit. Make their life difficult by bidding to the five level before fourth in hand has a chance to bid. Like the 4th bid on Hand 4, 5♣ is Pass or Correct. In fact you are so weak that you might even jump to 6\$ to give opponents a harder problem. At any level, bidding clubs is Pass with clubs or Convert if holding diamonds.

7. 5. You can't play in 3NT with a diamond void as you won't be able to get to dummy to cash the diamonds. 5 + is better played by your hand to protect the tenaces. The opening lead is almost bound to give a trick away.

8. 6NT. You have twelve tricks if partner has seven clubs and thirteen tricks if partner has an eight-card suit.

An additional useful refinement

If your memory can stand the strain, you can add one more asking bid. A bid of 4 over 3NT can be used to ask opener if the hand has a singleton or void. Over this, a response of 4♥ shows a singleton or void heart, 4♠ shows a singleton or void spade, 4NT denies a singleton or void, and five of opener's long minor shows a singleton or void in the other minor.

Is it Blackwood?

EASLEY Blackwood invented an ace-asking convention way back in 1933. Let's look at it in its original, simplest form.

What is Blackwood?

In some situations, but not all, a bid of 4NT asks partner to show how many aces he holds. The responses are:

- 5♣ Zero or four aces.
- 5 One ace.
- 5♥ Two aces.
- 5♠ Three aces.

Blackwood in action



West opens $1 \blacklozenge$ and East raises to $3 \blacklozenge$. Now game in diamonds is certain, but slam is possible. West bids 4NT. This is Blackwood, as West would just bid 3NT to play in the no-trump game. East replies $5 \diamondsuit$, showing one ace. Only one ace is missing, so West bids $6 \blacklozenge$, knowing there is one trick to be lost.



West opens $1 \blacklozenge$; again East raises to $3 \diamondsuit$. West bids 4NT, but this time East replies $5 \clubsuit$ showing two aces. Now West knows no aces are missing and can count thirteen tricks, so bids $7 \blacklozenge$ or better still 7NT.



West opens 1 \blacklozenge ; again East raises to 3 \diamondsuit . West bids 4NT, but this time East replies 5 \clubsuit showing no aces. Knowing two aces are missing, West bids 5 \diamondsuit and East must pass.

In all the deals above West has the same hand and opens $1\diamondsuit$. But East has three different hands opposite that are all possible raises to $3\diamondsuit$. West is always going to game, so it is safe to bid 4NT, since $5\heartsuit$, which takes the partnership beyond game, guarantees two aces in the East hand.

If your side has agreed a suit, a bid of 4NT is asking how many aces you hold.

When 4NT is not Blackwood

Partner opens 1NT showing 12-14 points and you have a good hand. If you have 22 or more points, your side must have at least a combined 34 high-card points. You cannot be missing two aces: two aces are 8 points and if there were two aces missing you would have at most a combined 32 HCP. Neither with 34 points can you be missing an ace and a king. You don't need to ask for aces – you can just bid 6NT.

But suppose you have this hand. It has a good source of tricks in the minors, but it will need partner to be maximum for 1NT before



your side wants to bid a slam. A bid of 4NT asks partner to bid a slam if he has a maximum hand for his 1NT opening bid, or pass if he holds a minimum for his 1NT.

This also applies if partner rebids 1NT. Say the bidding goes 1 - 1 - 1NT. Here the 1NT rebid shows a hand too good to open 1NT, around 15-16 HCP. 4NT by responder asks partner to bid a slam with a maximum 1NT rebid.

A direct bid of 4NT over 1NT asks partner to bid a slam with a maximum point count. It does not ask about aces.

What happens if opponents bid over 4NT?

When you have distributional hands, the opponents may interfere in your auction.



For example:



East was going to bid 5 in reply to Blackwood, but cannot do so when North bids 5.

Some players use a convention called DOPI in this position. It stands for Double = zero aces, Pass = one ace, and to bid up the line with more than one ace. So on the hand shown East would pass to show his one ace. That is enough for West to bid 6.



East was going to bid 5^{\clubsuit} over 4NT to show two aces. Now a bid of 5NT over 5^{\clubsuit} shows two aces and West can bid 7^{\clubsuit} or better still 7NT.

Holding the hand shown last in the first column, East would double to show no aces and West would have to settle for a penalty by passing the double There is no point in bidding a slam missing two aces! East-West will surely beat 5⁴ even if North or South is void in diamonds.

The 4NT opening bid

IN recent articles I have looked at opening suit bids right up to the five level and also covered opening 3NT with a solid minor suit. But what, if anything, should an opening 4NT mean? It is not really needed as standard Blackwood, as if partner wants to know how many aces I hold, he can open with a strong two of a suit or a game forcing 2 and then bid a Blackwood 4NT to find out about aces. But partner can have a problem if he wants to find out if I hold one specific ace. Suppose he holds:



I admit you will have to wait a long time till you pick up such a good hand and, if you ever do, to open 6 is a sensible choice. But if partner holds the ace of diamonds, you would want to be in 74. How can you find out? If you use ordinary Blackwood and partner shows one ace, you won't know if it is the ace of hearts or the ace of diamonds. Only if partner shows two aces can you bid the grand slam with confidence, in which case you should choose 7NT just in case someone can get a ruff.

The answer to this dilemma is to open 4NT, not ordinary Blackwood but asking partner to name the ace they hold!

Responding to a 4NT opening bid

If second hand passes partner's 4NT opening, responder shows the specific ace held, if he has one:

5 🛧	No aces
5♦	Diamond ace
57	Heart ace
5♠	Spade ace
5NT	Any two aces
6 뢒	Club ace

After the response to 4NT, opener is in charge and bids the final contract.

Examples

	Open 4NT. If
Hand 1	responder bids
≜ A	5 ♣ (no aces),
♥KQ	bid 5♦; if he
♦ A K Q J 10 8 7 5 3	bids 5♥ (heart
≜ 6	ace); bid 6♦; if
	he bids 6 (club

responder bids 5NT (two aces), bid 7NT.

Hand 2 ♠ A K Q 9 8 7 ♥ A K ♦ A K Q J ♣ 6
--

It's a great hand but the spades are not solid. To open 4NT is risky; a spade slam could fail if a defender has four spades. If part-

Open 4NT. If

responder bids

5♣ or 5♦, bid

 $6\clubsuit$; if he replies

ace), bid $6 \blacklozenge$; if

ner has short spades but long diamonds, 6\$ may be making. Open a game-forcing 24.

Hand 3
≜KQJ ▼AK
♦ Void ♠ A K Q J 10 9 8 7

Hand 4

Void

🕈 A K Q J 10 9

A K Q J 10 9

♠ 2

5♠, bid 7♣; if he bids 5NT, showing two aces, bid 7NT. You make

а grand slam if partner has the spade ace. But if he has length in one of your suits you want to play in it, or oppo-

nents may get a ruff. Opening 2 should get you to the right suit, but 4NT will tell you what you need to know - your choice!

and 5 Void A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 K Q J 3
--

You would love to know if partner has a minorsuit ace but opening 4NT is risky. If partner replies 5♠, you have to bid 6



knowing that you are off two aces. If partner responds 5NT, you can't identify the two aces. Open 2♣ and take it from there.

Hand 6	
🛦 A K Q 10 9 8 6 5 4	
🔻 K Q J	
♦ Void	
♣ 3	

You could open 4NT on this hand, because if partner shows the ace of hearts or clubs you will bid 64. If partner shows the

diamond ace, you will sign off in 5♠. But of course, if he bids 5NT, you're on a guess!

What do you do if the opponents bid over 4NT?

Opponents will not always pass an opening 4NT; after all, this will be a freak deal and they too may have a very long suit. I discussed last time using DOPI when opponents interfere over normal Blackwood. DOPI means that a double of the overcall shows no ace, to pass shows one ace, to bid something shows two or more aces. Using DOPI after partner has opened with 4NT may not tell him exactly what he wants to know, but it should give him some useful pointers.

To summarise:

- An opening bid of 4NT shows a hand with a long solid suit in which the partnership will be playing.
- Opener will often have a void in a side suit, making the hand unsuitable for normal Blackwood.
- Responder cannot override opener's choice of suit, even with a void in the chosen suit.



WHILE most partnership agreements relate to bidding, you should never forget, when choosing the opening lead, the agreements you have made. When you are defending a 3NT contract, your aim is to cash five tricks before declarer can take nine. Of course, getting declarer more than one down is great, but you should concentrate all your efforts on achieving that important one down. Usually you do that by leading your longest and strongest suit and hoping that the lead will create five winners for your side.

If partner has overcalled, you lead partner's suit most of the time. Partner's overcall is sending a very clear message: 'This is my best suit, please lead it!', which is why it is poor practice to overcall on bad suits. If partner never has a good suit, normally with five cards or more and containing honour cards, you will stop trusting partner's overcalls and your combined defence will suffer.

Assuming partner hasn't bid, you normally lead your longest suit against a notrump contract, as you hope to set up winners in that suit. Of course, if declarer has bid your best suit, you may well choose to lead another suit.

So you pick the suit that you are going to lead taking into account the auction, and then you pick the card that is best from your holding.

Which card would you or your partner lead when the bidding has gone 1NT (12-14) – (Pass) – 3NT – (All Pass)?

Hand 1	Hand 2
♠ Q J 9 8 2	🛧 A 2
♥ 76	💙 A 6 3
🔶 Q 9 7 6 2	🔶 A 6 5
≜ 8	86543

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

1. The natural lead is the queen of spades, the top card from a fairly solid sequence. However, if declarer has opened 1♠ and then rebid 3NT over a 2♥ response, I would prefer to lead my other long suit and would choose the six of diamonds, my fourth highest. Though the suit is weaker, it is much more likely that partner has greater length and useful cards in diamonds. Partner will probably be able to tell that I have a suit headed by an honour as I have chosen a low card.

From long suits headed by an honour sequence, lead the top honour.

Review the bidding before choosing your lead. If opponents have bid the suit you would normally lead, think again.

2. I would lead clubs, my longest suit, as with three aces I stand a good chance of setting up a couple of club winners and still have an entry to cash them. I would choose the six of clubs, the second-highest card in a bad suit. This is an attempt to tell partner not to waste his high cards but it will depend on the clubs in dummy whether partner can read this lead.

From long suits not headed by honour cards, lead the second highest.

3. Lead the six of hearts. Even if partner only has the ten of hearts and an entry to return a heart, I stand quite a good chance of making four heart tricks. Again this is fourth highest of the best suit I hold.

But suppose declarer had opened the bidding with 1♥ and rebid 3NT over his

partner's $2 \blacklozenge$ response Now a heart lead is unattractive, much more likely to help declarer than the defence. If the opening bid was $1 \clubsuit$, I would lead the ten of spades. *Reconsider your natural lead if declarer*

Partnership agreements

when leading

has bid your best suit.

4. Lead the nine of spades. This hand is so bad that it is no use trying to set up heart winners. Even if you succeed, you have no entry to cash them. Stayman has not been used during the auction, so dummy probably won't have four spades. Lead the nine of spades and hope to hit partner's best suit.

From a doubleton, lead the higher card.

5. With 11 points, partner can have very few high cards. I would lead my diamonds from the top, hoping to drop a doubleton honour from one of the other three hands. After cashing the ace and king of diamonds, I would lead the ten of diamonds to show that my entry is in a higher-ranking suit.

If opponents bid confidently to 3NT, they normally have 25 or more points. Add your 11 points to 25 and you get 36. So partner has at most 4 points, perhaps fewer. So the contract may have to be beaten from your hand alone.

If and only if, you have an outside entry, don't automatically lead fourth highest. Sometimes cashing honours from the top may drop an honour card and establish your winners.

6. This hand turned up in a beginners duplicate and the lead chosen was the two of hearts, the fourth highest heart. Whilst one normally leads fourth highest of one's longest suit, there are times when this is clearly incorrect.

Don't blindly follow the standard rules, stop and think before you lead.

The quiz reminds you that any partnership needs defensive agreements, if they are to become good defenders. Whilst having agreements is a good thing, you must sometimes break those agreements when common sense tells you that this is not the time to keep them. \Box



LEADING the top card of a sequence of honours in a suit where we have length is often a good lead. As well as establishing potential winners for our side, it passes useful information to partner about where your points are and how the contract might be beaten. This can help your partner work out where your tricks and also declarer's tricks might be coming from.

Suppose you are on lead to an opponent's 3NT contract and you hold $\mathbf{V}Q$ -J-10-9. Any of the four cards would do, but you should choose the card that will pass the most useful information to your partner. If you lead your fourth highest card, the $\mathbf{V}9$, partner may think you are leading the top card of a suit with no honours. Lead the $\mathbf{V}Q$ and partner knows you have a good holding in hearts.

But what exactly do you expect partner to do with that information? Consider this hand where South opened 1NT showing 12-14 points and North jumped to 3NT. Your partner leads the ♥Q and this is what you can see:



Given you have the \forall A, partner should have a decent sequence of cards in the heart suit. From \forall Q-J-7-6-3 partner would lead the \forall 6, fourth highest counting down from the top, not the queen. Partner's top

Top of a sequence of honours can be a good lead

hearts must be at least as good as Q-J-9 to justify leading the \P Q. By finding the one useful card in your hand, partner has done well to lead a heart. If you play the \P A and return the \P 8, you will set up declarer's \P K but you hope to create some heart winners for your partner to cash when he gains the lead. Dummy has 14 points and you have 5. Even if declarer has a maximum of 14 points, partner must have at least 7 points of which 3 are the \P Q-J. So it's quite possible that partner will have an entry to cash his heart winners once they are established. Play the \P A and return the \P 8.



Once again the contract is 3NT (1NT -3NT) and partner leads ♥Q. Dummy has 13 points, you have 9. Declarer has at least 12 points of which three are the VK, leaving at most 6 points for partner and maybe as few as 4, of which 3 are the ♥Q-J. If partner's heart winners are established, the only possible entry to partner's hand is likely to be in the heart suit. You should play your ♥2 not your ♥A. Declarer doesn't know who has the ♥A, it could be in your partner's hand, so declarer will probably win the first heart with the ♥K and will surely play on diamonds. When you get in with the $\blacklozenge Q$, you can play the $\blacktriangledown A$ and then the ♥8. You just hope partner has five hearts and that we can cash four winning hearts to defeat 3NT.

Which card would you lead with the following hands, when your right-hand opponent has opened 1NT which has been raised directly to 3NT?

Hand 1	Hand 2 ♠ A 2 ♥ A 6 3 ♦ A 6 5 ♣ 8 6 5 4 3
Hand 3	Hand 4
▲ A 3	♠ 8 6 3
♥ 8 5 3	♥ A K Q 2
♦ A K 10 9 7	♦ 10 8 5
▲ 7 4 2	♣ 9 7 5

1. riangleQ. Although the sequence of spades is missing the riangle10, the presence of the nine and eight make this a strong holding. A fourth highest riangle8 is likely to suggest to partner that you have a bad suit and are leading your second highest spade from a poor holding.

2. ♠6. Don't lead an unsupported ace! Lead a club despite your very poor club holding. Even if declarer has three club stoppers, your first lead will knock out one. When in with one of your aces you can knock out a second club stopper. When in with the second ace you can knock out the third club stopper (if declarer has a third stopper) and you hope to get in with your third ace to cash two winning clubs.

3. & (or & A). With 11 points, partner has at most 4, maybe fewer. So to beat the contract you must set up diamond winners and hope to get in with the & A, to cash those winners. Leading out the & A and & K will establish diamond tricks when opponents' diamonds break 3-3 or when one of them has a doubleton diamond which includes an honour. More on king leads soon.

4. \blacktriangleleft A (or \blacklozenge K). No Stayman used, which suggests dummy doesn't have four hearts, but declarer may. This time you just have to hope you can cash four hearts and that partner will produce the setting trick. I had one student who led the \blacklozenge 2 from this holding and let declarer make a trick with \blacklozenge J-4 facing \blacklozenge 8-3 in dummy. The \clubsuit J won trick one when the defence could have taken the first five heart tricks!



ALMOST all leads to no-trump contracts carry a message. It's up to partner to remember what the message is and react in an appropriate way. Particularly so is the lead of an ace or king, because it is a lead that we rarely make and which requires partner to give a specific signal. With both the ace and king heading the suit you decide to lead, does it matter which one you decide to play? Yes it does, but only if you have agreed with your partner what the leads mean. If you have never discussed it, you can't blame partner if he misreads your lead.

In Standard English the lead of an ace normally shows that you have the king as well and asks partner if they like your lead. For example, as West you hold:

▲ J 8 7 2
♥ J 9 6 2
♦ A K 4
♣ 7 5

South, the dealer, opened 1♥, you passed, and North responded 2♠. Your partner passed and South rebid 2NT showing 15-16 points. North

now bid 3♠, over which South bid 3NT. How should you be thinking when you decide what to lead?

South's bid showed 15-16 points and as North made a responder's reverse it's likely that North has at least 13 points, giving North-South at least a combined 28 points. You have nine points, so at best partner has three points, quite possibly even fewer.

We normally lead a four card or longer suit against 3NT hoping to set up winners in our long suit, so on many auctions your choice would be the two of spades or the two of hearts. But here both suits have been bid by the opposition, making them unattractive leads and quite likely to cost your side a trick.

While we don't have four diamonds,

Leading an ace against no-trumps

diamonds is undoubtedly our strongest suit. Maybe partner has diamond length. And if partner has long diamonds headed by the queen, we might be able to take the first five tricks in diamonds. It may be an optimistic thought, but have you got a better idea? So you decide to lead diamonds, but should it be the ace or king?

In Standard English the king is a strong lead, showing a good suit headed by at least three honours, so the lead from a holding such as A-K-4 should be the *ace!* The lead of an ace normally, but not always, shows the king and asks partner to give an encouraging signal if he has a good holding in the suit. This is done by playing as high a card as can be spared. Good holdings are ones headed by the queen, or the jack if the queen is doubleton in dummy – or any six-card suit is good as the queen is likely to drop doubleton from declarer's hand.

Partner should discourage by playing a small card with a poor holding. Here is the full deal:



West leads the ace of diamonds. What card should East play?

Remember: partner's lead of an ace

against a no-trump contract, normally shows a suit like A-K-x or maybe longer. It asks you to encourage by playing a high card if you hold the queen. You should also encourage with any six-card holding. Here East has an easy decision and should play the nine of diamonds

Would you consider leading your ace from either of the hands below? On both deals South opened 1NT, North replied with a Stayman 2^{\clubsuit} , South bid 2^{\bigstar} and North bid 2NT which South raised to 3NT.

Hand 1	Hand 2
🛦 Q 5 3 2	🛦 K 2
💙 Q J 3	💙 A K 3
• 643	🔶 Q 10 5
📥 A K 7	8 6 5 4 3

On Hand 1 North hasn't actually bid hearts, but has implied holding four hearts by using Stayman. The bidding suggests that North has 11, or maybe 12, points and that South has 14 or a good 13 points. So North-South probably have almost exactly a combined 25 points. You have 12, so that leaves just 3 points for partner. South has shown spades and North has implied hearts, making either major-suit lead unattractive. It may be a disaster but leading the ace of clubs looks the best lead to me.

Did you choose the heart ace on Hand 2? It is very unlikely to be the winning lead. If North has four hearts – and declarer must have at least two hearts – partner cannot have five hearts headed by the queen. Lead a club and hope that your high cards in the other suits provide enough entries to allow you to continue leading clubs and eventually establish club winners.

Next time I will look at what it means to lead a king against opponents' no-trump contract. Before that article appears why not discuss ace and king leads with your partner, to check you are on the same wavelength.