

# SIMPLE SLAM BIDDING AND PLAY

With Simon and Vera Simple

## Chapter 4: Finding the Lead

With Vera Simple

Most well bid slams will make, but there are times when they will founder on bad breaks, or lucky or well thought out leads. Many contracts can be defeated at trick one but are not, because the 'correct' lead is not always the one to defeat declarer. The INCORRECT lead can sometimes work wonders, and the mark of the truly great player is when they find the 'incorrect' lead to defeat an impregnable contract. But let's not worry about that. We're here to talk specifically about slams, and this little excursion is into finding the 'correct' lead against them.

Because most slams that are properly bid will make anyway, and because there are only two tricks required to beat a small slam and one to beat a grand, the defence SHOULD be easier than against lower level contracts. In lower level contracts, all sorts of manoeuvring can take place between declarer and defenders. Often in low level part scores the defenders and declarer both throw tricks round like they were going out of fashion, only to end up with the same result that everyone else is getting via different routes. In slam contracts this just does not happen and success or failure can often be pretty well instantaneous. Which is why it will pay you to cultivate the 'correct' approach to leading against slams, if indeed there is one. To start with, let me give you a lead problem. You are West and the auction has proceeded as follows:

Dealer	North	Nil Vul	
N	E	S	W
1NT	NB	2C	NB
2D	NB	4C	NB
4H	NB	6C	

Your hand to lead from:

(a) ♠5 ♥10 7 6 4 3 ♦J 10 9 8 ♣A 5 3  
What would you lead?

Now let me change your hand to:

(b) ♠5 ♥10 7 6 4 3 ♦J 10 9 8 ♣8 5 3  
What would you lead?

And another small change

(c) ♠5 ♥10 7 6 3 ♦J 10 9 8 3 ♣A 5 3  
What would you lead THIS time?

At all times, you should be taking a great interest in the bidding, because the BIDDING will help you to formulate a plan for the defence if you happen to be on lead, or if your partner is on lead, it will help you to understand what PARTNER'S lead is about and why partner has

led the card they have. But this time YOU are the one who has to make the lead. It MAY be irrelevant, but if there IS a lead that will defeat the contract, you have to find it.

By following the bidding and applying some logical reasoning to the problem, you SHOULD be able to find the ONLY sensible lead from the above three hands.

What does the bidding mean? Let's go through our reasoning process.

North has opened 1NT. It really is quite irrelevant whether the 1NT is weak, strong, or intermediate. South has bid STAYMAN, therefore South has an interest in one or both of the major suits. North has denied having a major, and on the basis of that, South has asked for aces and when North has shown one, bid a confident 6C. The inferences are that South has FOUR hearts or spades but certainly not both (unless South is 4405) as well as six clubs. North and South are also missing one ace and may not be missing anything more.

On hand (a) you KNOW they're missing the ace because you have it. On hand (b) you know your PARTNER has the missing ace but you don't know which ace it is. On hand (c) you once more know what the missing ace is and who has it. Does all this preamble give you a hint as to how you might be able to find the ONLY lead that is likely to break the slam?

a)

Dealer	North	Nil Vul	
N	E	S	W
1NT	NB	2C	NB
2D	NB	4C	NB
4H	NB	6C	

Your hand to lead from:

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

If you chose your singleton spade on the first hand, you weren't thinking, were you? Or did you not believe the opponents' bidding? If you lead a singleton in the hope of obtaining a ruff, how can you obtain the ruff unless your PARTNER gains the lead and is able to lead the suit back to you? Think about it. If partner gets the lead and you get your ruff, declarer will do down TWO, not just one, so your singleton lead is aimed at setting the slam TWO tricks. Let's be real! Yes, a ruff MIGHT be the only way to defeat the 6C contract, but it is NOT you who will be getting it, for two reasons. YOU are the one who will gain the lead because YOU have the ace of trumps. And the only ruff that is possible for your side is if PARTNER has a singleton somewhere. Where, then, is THAT likely to be? The answer is clear enough. If South was by some chance interested in the majors, then South might have four HEARTS. If North has THREE, then your partner has ONE. So, lead a low heart and if dummy comes down with three of them, don't let ANYTHING sway you from winning the FIRST lead of clubs and continuing another heart. Declarer may try the play of leading the queen of clubs from hand when there are two small clubs in dummy, or the jack from hand when dummy has Kx. That's more tricky, but would South bid 6C holding six to the jack? But that could be your problem LATER, not at trick one. At trick one your problem is to make the best lead, and nobody can convince me that with the above holding there is any other lead that should even be contemplated.

b)

Dealer North Nil Vul

N	E	S	W
1NT	NB	2C	NB
2D	NB	4C	NB
4H	NB	6C	

(b) ♠ 5 ♥ 10 7 6 4 3 ♦ J 10 9 8 ♣ 8 5 3

Following the same reasoning, THIS time the only sensible lead IS your singleton. You know that partner has an ace, but not which one. If it is the ace of SPADES, death at trick two for declarer, because no matter how declarer false cards, partner will see your lead and KNOW that there is no other way to defeat the contract than by you ruffing trick two. And if partner has the ace of trumps, partner will also grab that immediately and shoot back a second spade. If partner has either red ace, your choice of lead was unlikely to defeat the contract.

c)

Dealer North Nil Vul

N	E	S	W
1NT	NB	2C	NB
2D	NB	4C	NB
4H	NB	6C	

(c) ♠ 5 ♥ 10 7 6 3 ♦ J 10 9 8 3 ♣ A 5 3

A slight change, but a change just sufficient to tell you that looking for a spade ruff is silly and looking for a heart ruff in partner's hand is asking for miracles. You see, if the opponents are to be believed, and their bidding is to be trusted, your partner cannot possibly have a singleton heart. WHY? Because NORTH can have no more than three, having denied four. SOUTH should not have more than FOUR because with five, South should not have used Stayman at all, and should have forced some other way. That leaves no fewer than TWO hearts in partner's hand. THIS time the only possibility of a singleton in partner's hand is in DIAMONDS, so the only lead that is likely to defeat the slam is a DIAMOND. In that case, fortunately, the diamond lead is also a very safe one, so with that particular hand you might find that a lot of people are leading the jack of diamonds, though possibly for the wrong reason!

Now let me show you the actual hands as they were when the slam was played:

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

BOARD 1 DEALER North Nil  
VUL

Not quite what you might have expected, and there are twelve easy tricks in No Trumps. But who can blame South for bidding 6C when for all South knew, North may be missing the ace and king of spades. As for East, there ARE times when

an eight card suit is NOT worth bidding! Though if East HAD bid spades and South settled in 6C, this time VERY sensibly, it would certainly have been a case of NOT leading your partner's suit. Imagine West NOT leading his partner's suit with THAT holding, and against a slam even!

Of course East's hand might have been less distributional, with hearts AND spades, and SOUTH might have had spades and not hearts. In that case, East MIGHT have had a singleton diamond and West's only lead to sink 6C would have been a diamond. Easy enough to conjure up such a layout, but the diamond lead I believe is not as good as a heart. With hand (c) though, you can see that if you take East's two of diamonds and put it in the West hand, and give East one of West's hearts, the diamond lead from West is not only clear cut but does in fact strike gold!