

Ultimate Defence 16

Let us now look at the three opening lead problems posed in the previous issue and see what we can learn about the thought processes that go through an expert defender's mind.

1. Dealer East All Vul

♠ 10 9 8
♥ Q 7 5 2
♦ A Q
♣ K J 7 3

The bidding:

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W	N	E	S
		1NT	NB
2C	NB	2D	NB
3NT	NB	NB	NB

After East opens 1NT, South is cut out of the bidding. West uses Stayman to look for a major suit fit, but East denies having 4H or 4S so West bids 3NT. Should South lead the recommended 'fourth highest of longest and strongest'? That would be the three of clubs. How many points can partner have? A quick bit of maths tells South that EW have at least 25 between them to bid to 3NT, which leaves a MAXIMUM of three with partner. Therefore leading the three of clubs would be looking for the only points partner could hold, the queen of clubs. What about a heart? West's Stayman should warn South off that idea. West could have a four card heart suit and the lead of a heart might well give something away. The best option should be to play a passive game and start by leading the spade ten. That is unlikely to give anything away and if partner has four spades, who knows? Whatever the case, this is a time for being passive, so lead the top spade and keep leading them.

2. Dealer West EW Vul

♠ K 9 7 5 2

♥ Q J 8

♦ 7

♣ A 9 7 5

The bidding:

W	N	E	S
1NT	NB	3H	NB
4H	NB	NB	NB

What would you lead?

What does the bidding tell South this time? West has a balanced hand with 12-14 HCP. East has FORCED to game and shown a FIVE card heart suit (with six, he would have bid 4H immediately). West has three or maybe even four card heart support. South has learnt not to lead unsupported aces, or to underlead them, and a trump lead with that holding is ludicrous. So the only choice is between a spade from the LONG suit, or a diamond from the SHORT suit. A spade MAY give a trick away, but then again declarer seems likely to be short in that suit so it may not give a trick away. With a singleton spade, declarer may be reluctant to finesse if there is a finesse available.

The diamond lead may strike partner with the ace (there is JUST room for partner to have 5 HCP), but then, against that, if you DO get your ruff, what does that do to your trumps? Yes, it reduces them to NO tricks, so your ruff will achieve nothing other than to transfer the one trick you already have. PLUS, the danger that you might pick up any vital cards in partner's diamond suit. That is what would have happened at the time the deal was played, and the only lead that worked out was a low spade, which was based on logical reasons, and not blind following of rules such as leading your singletons hoping for a ruff. Why ask for a ruff when you don't want, or need, one?

3. Dealer West All Vul

♠ J 10
♥ Q 10 7 5
♦ J 9 8
♣ A 9 5 3

The bidding:

W	N	E	S
1H	NB	1NT	NB
3NT	NB	NB	NB

One of the first things that beginners must learn is to “lead partner's suit”. What am I talking about, you may ask. Only opponents have bid anything. That's true, but their bidding has told South that North's suit is spades. North must have at least four of them since East bid 1NT, **BYPASSING** spades, and West cannot have five of them, though a four card spade suit with West is **JUST** possible, if West has 4-4 in the majors. So, lead your partner's suit! Not just because it is their suit but because opening any of your own suits is likely to give something away. As it happens, when this deal was played, North held five spades to the ace king but did not overcall as it was all he had. But fortunately South was smart enough to work out that spades was partner's suit, and led the jack of spades. North ducked the first spade, allowing declarer to win the queen, but in the process made sure he signalled strongly, and when South won the club ace, he was able to continue with the spade ten which North gratefully overtook to win the next four ricks.

Defence is all about working on a plan from the beginning, and that includes making use of all the information you have available, which includes the bidding. The opening lead is the beginning of the defence, but must be followed up by a **COMBINED** effort by both defenders in a partnership. During the next issues we will have a look at a number of deals where top defence can be achieved by sensible thinking and good partnership communication and understanding.