

Opening Leads



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by Derek Patterson

Secure What Is Rightfully Yours

SITTING West at Game All, on lead to 3♦, what would be your choice with the following collection?

♠ A K 9 5
♥ A J 8
♦ 7 4 2
♣ K J 9

This lead problem is taken from a recent international tournament. The ♠A is an obvious candidate, combining safety with attack while retaining control of the hand but such decisions should not be made without due consideration.

Renowned for her reliable play (so much so that her friends call her 'la Banque de France'), my partner, with due diligence, reviewed the auction first. This is a crucial part of the decision-making process, often providing important clues to the correct defence. On this occasion, the bidding had been very revealing:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
1NT	Dble	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥ ¹	Pass	3♦
All Pass			

¹ 'Pass' would have been more sensible, as you will see later.

So what did 'la Banque de France' lead? A trump? Was this total madness or the result of a clear and logical analysis of the hand? Very much the latter, as we shall see.

Opener had shown a two-suiter and responder's actions had indicated a distinct dislike for spades. The reasoning behind the lead was that if dummy's trumps could be removed then the ♠A-K-9-5 would be certain tricks in defence, whereas, otherwise, opener might be able to ruff spades in the dummy.

Tip: Listen to the bidding – there will often be very clear clues guiding you towards the best defence and, therefore, the best opening lead.

The full deal was:

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

Declarer won the diamond lead in dummy and led a spade to the queen. West won this and played a second trump. This meant that there were four spade tricks for the defenders to go with the heart ace and 3♦ was one down.

On the lead of the ♠A, declarer cannot be stopped from ruffing one spade and later knocking out the ♠K, establishing the suit for three tricks (including the ruff) – and 3♦ would make plus one.

So, the strategy of leading trumps was vindicated by the result – there is no need for another run on the banks.

The deal illustrates a good general principle:

Tip: With a strong holding in a side-suit that declarer will want to establish, it is often best to lead a trump...

... thereby reducing declarer's ruffs in this suit and avoiding the irritation of having your hoped-for winners ruffed (securing what is rightfully yours).

Note that my contribution on the deal was, merely, to pass throughout and to follow suit when required. On reflection, it is probably just as well! □

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