

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Hand 1

Love All, Dealer North

♠ K Q 10 6 2
♥ J 7
♦ A Q 6
♣ K Q 9

♠ A
♥ Q 5 3
♦ J 10 8 5 2
♣ A 5 4 2

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ 8 5 3
♥ 10 8 6 4 2
♦ 3
♣ J 8 7 3

♠ J 9 7 4
♥ A K 9
♦ K 9 7 4
♣ 10 6

Hand 1 is a trivial affair but is there as a peg on which to hang a discussion. Hand 2 provides a contrast. North-South bid to 4♣ and East has an obvious lead of his singleton Diamond. North plays trumps but West has two crucial entries – the Ace of trumps and the Ace of Clubs, which allow him to give East two Diamond ruffs. Note this, because it is a truism that *the worse your hand is, the better a shortage lead is*. Here, the initial Diamond lead is marked from East – as North-South have declined to bid beyond the four-level West is marked with *something*. The fact that he has two Aces is hardly lucky. Some may say that some sort of suit-preference signal is necessary here when West gives East a Diamond ruff at trick three. Not a bit of it! What else could East lead but a Club at trick four with the ♥A K staring at him on table? Yes, 3NT is unbeatable. Should North-South bid it?

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT ¹	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Hand 3

East-West Game, Dealer South

♠ K 10 7
♥ Q 8 5 2
♦ A K 10
♣ Q 9 6

♠ 9 6
♥ 10 9
♦ 9 8 7 4
♣ J 7 5 4 2

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ A Q 4 3 2
♥ J
♦ Q 6 5 3 2
♣ K 3

♠ J 8 5
♥ A K 7 6 4 3
♦ J
♣ A 10 8

¹ *Balanced raise to 4♥.*
North-South reach 4♥ and West has to find a lead. Well, we are back to Hand 1 again, with a twist in the endgame. It is relatively clear to lead the ♠9 in the vague hope of obtaining a ruff. The bidding has frozen East out of the auction, so there may be a decent collection over there. In any case, how might you collect four tricks as a partnership? You have to do some work yourself! *The worse your hand is, the better a shortage lead is* and here you have a horror. You'd like partner to have the ♠A K or the ♠A and the Ace of trumps, but here the well-positioned ♠A Q does just as well. However, after three rounds of Spades, (East can be sure West has only two) what do you lead at trick four? Anything but a Club! How can you tell that the suit is *frozen*? Well, East would have cashed the ♠A had he held it – if the Ace lies with South there is no basis to open up the suit. Here, a Club switch lets 4♥ through.

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

Hand 5

North-South Game, Dealer North

♠ A K Q J 8
♥ K 7
♦ A 10 4
♣ Q 8 6

♠ 5
♥ Q J 9 3
♦ Q 7 6 5 3
♣ J 4 3

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ 7 4 2
♥ A 5 4 2
♦ J 9
♣ K 9 7 5

♠ 10 9 6 3
♥ 10 8 6
♦ K 8 2
♣ A 10 2

What should you lead from the East hand after a completely uninformative auction? A Heart is unthinkable, a Diamond repulsive (Jack from J x is the last resort of the truly desperate) and a low Club (the least bad of the plain-suit options) is dangerous. If this deal depends on *passive defence* (and, admittedly, you can't tell if it does) then a trump lead may be best. There is also the possibility that a trump lead may cut down ruffing values in dummy, so may in fact represent an *active defence* – who can tell? As it is, a plain-suit lead would concede an instant trick; a Club lead may concede two tricks were West to make the ill-starred play of the Jack in third seat. A trump lead defeats 4♣ if East-West continue to defend passively whenever they gain the lead. Declarer has eight on top and can wangle a ninth but not a tenth. Here, on this layout of the cards, passivity wins the day – but, as Gershwin wrote, *it ain't necessarily so*. Study the East hand carefully, it may make a reappearance on the stage...

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	1♠	Pass
Pass	Dble	All Pass	Pass

Hand 7

Game All, Dealer South

♠ 4
♥ Q J 10 5
♦ K Q J 8 5
♣ K J 7

♠ 10 6
♥ A 8 4 2
♦ 7 6 4 3 2
♣ 9 4

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ A 7 5 3 2
♥ K 7 3
♦ A
♣ A 8 6 3

♠ K Q J 9 8
♥ 9 6
♦ 10 9
♣ Q 10 5 2

North-South play for a penalty after East makes a stronger-than-usual overcall of 1♠, North makes a re-opening Double and South Passes it out. Now, it may look obvious to lead a Diamond from the South hand but that would allow East to make his contract. Taking the ♦A, East would play off the Ace and another Club, scoring a Club ruff on table. Add that to two Hearts, the ♠A and a Diamond ruff in hand and declarer would elope with seven tricks before North-South get going. Ugh. With such good trumps South does not want, or need, a ruff. The correct defensive strategy is to try to prevent East from making the small trumps in his hand and the way to do that is to lead the ♠K. Sure, it is fortunate to find the Ten of Spades in dummy, but what does it cost? Defending 1♠x is akin to playing in 1♠. How do you play these contracts? Often by drawing trumps... After a trump lead East can make no more than six tricks for 200 points away.

West	North	East	South
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass

Hand 2

North-South Game, Dealer East

♠ Q 10 8 6 3
♥ 8
♦ 10 9 5 3
♣ 7 6 2

♠ A J 7 4
♥ J 7 4 2
♦ K Q
♣ 9 8 3

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ K 9 5
♥ K Q 10 9 6
♦ J 8
♣ A K 4

♠ 2
♥ A 5 3
♦ A 7 6 4 2
♣ Q J 10 5

Well, what should you lead to 4♥ as South? Note that South is miles away from any sort of suicidal overcall, vulnerable, so East has no idea of the location of any of the high cards. That's an aside – what is the right lead? Well, the ♣Q is a standout – the singleton Spade represents a very feeble choice. How could poor old North have any sort of entry to give you a Spade ruff? He is marked with nothing – if that. Leading the singleton Spade here would allow East an easy ride – the Ten would force the King, declarer would draw trumps and establish a Spade trick for a Club discard. Note the effect on *tempo* of a Club lead. Now there is no way East can avoid losing a trick in each suit. Note the contrast between this hand and the last. The aphorism *the worse your hand is, the better a shortage lead is* becomes: *the better your hand is the worse a shortage is*.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	3♣	Pass
4♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

Hand 4

Game All, Dealer West

♠ Q 9 4
♥ K 10 7 6 2
♦ 9 6
♣ J 10 7

♠ A 10 7 6 3
♥ A Q 9
♦ J 5
♣ A 5 3

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ K 8 5 2
♥ 8 4
♦ K Q 10 3
♣ Q 6 4

♠ J
♥ J 5 3
♦ A 8 7 4 2
♣ K 9 8 2

Another relatively simple deal. With no clear indication of who has what North has to lead against 4♣. What? A trump is out of the question, a Heart is dangerous (but not wrong), a Diamond borders on the absurd and the compromise candidate is the ♣J. Note that a Diamond lead is wrong, wrong, wrong – and yet is all too popular in practice. Your hand is not hopeless (see Hand 3) and you have ♠Q 9 x. Do you really want a Diamond ruff? No, of course not! The effect of leading shortages at inappropriate times is that you encounter hands like these where the lead gives away a vital tempo. A Club lead is a killer; the defence can set up two Clubs to go with the ♦A and a trump. If West misplays the thing he may even lose a Heart as well. On a wretched Diamond lead the hand is a cakewalk, the losing Clubs disappearing on the long Diamonds. Now 4♣ makes for the loss of a trump, a Heart and a Diamond.

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

Hand 6

East-West Game, Dealer East

♠ 6 5
♥ 8 6
♦ A 7 6 4 3 2
♣ Q 10 3

♠ A 10 3
♥ K Q 10 9 7 3
♦ K
♣ J 8 4

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ K Q J 9 8
♥ J
♦ Q 10 8 5
♣ A 6 2

♠ 7 4 2
♥ A 5 4 2
♦ J 9
♣ K 9 7 5

Do you recognise the South hand here? Compare it with the East hand of Hand 5, and see what you might lead to 4♣. There a *passive defence* (a trump lead) defeated the game. Here, it would allow it through. Were you to lead a trump against 4♣ East would be laughing all the way to the bank. He would take trick one in hand and play the ♥J, giving South an insoluble dilemma. Ducking is no good – East would overtake and play Hearts, ditching Clubs. Actually, switching to Diamonds works just as well, since there is no Heart loser. Taking the ♥A at trick two allows declarer to draw trumps and run the Hearts, making overtricks. The lesson to be learnt from Hands 5 and 6 is that *circumstances alter cases*. Here, the bidding makes it clear that West has decent Hearts that will be used to dump losers. In this case, the defenders should aim to take their tricks before the rats get at them – a low Club lead is devastating. Many think leading from a King is a bridge crime. Poppycock and balderdash. Underleading an Ace is a crime.

West	North	East	South
4♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

Hand 8

Love All, Dealer West

♠ K 7
♥ K 10 8 6 2
♦ A 9 2
♣ 9 7 5

♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4 2
♥ Q
♦ K Q 7
♣ 4

N			
W		E	
			S

♠ 6 3
♥ J 9 3
♦ J 5 4
♣ A K J 8 2

♠ A
♥ A 7 5 4
♦ 10 8 6 3
♣ Q 10 6 3

A hand from real life in a teams-of-four match. What do you lead against 4♣ from the North hand? At one table North, obsessed by a medieval view of *not* leading from a King, tried a Club – a lead from which this author withholds all admiration. At the other table North led a more rational Heart. That netted a swing of 470 points as a Club allowed the contract home and a Heart lead beat it. True, North had to be awake and not play the King of trumps when West lead the Queen but that's an old chestnut. Why is a Club lead so bad? Well, it's likely to be dummy's suit – why should partner be well at home there? Why play partner for lots of juicy Club honours rather than for one (maybe two) Heart honours? It makes no logical sense. As in Hand 6 (above) passive leads are not always right, often they allow declarer the tempo to establish a side-suit. One of the worst opening leads is one from three small cards (yuk. Double yuk) unless the bidding has made it clear that you should.