

Board of the Week 30

By Dick Chapman

In a couple of recent columns I discussed Lightner doubles. One case illustrated that the principle might be used when defending 3NT. In the second, I discussed the original use of this double (lead directing against slams), but I didn't go into much detail because it was the board where our side couldn't use the double and we got "fixed."

This week's board shows the principle much more clearly. In a recent club game, you sit West holding these lovely cards:

♠8654 ♥J94 ♦ void ♣ KJ10765

North opens 2NT, South bids 3 diamonds to transfer to hearts, and soon the opponents find themselves in 6 hearts. What is your call?

What sort of crazy question is that? You have almost nothing, so of course you pass, right?

Wrong. Partner is on lead in a heart contract, and you have a void. Do you want a diamond lead? Yes. How can you get partner to lead a diamond? The answer is you double.

Remember our dear Peggy Jett teaching all of us newer players, "don't double slams!" The reasoning is this: if the opponents are in a bad slam, you already have your top board without the double. If the slam is making, your double will take an average board to a bottom. There is little or nothing to gain, and much to lose.

However, when partner is on lead and you want an unusual lead (i.e. a lead that partner wouldn't normally find), you double. By general agreement, the lead that is called for is dummy's first suit that is not trump.

So you double, all pass, and partner wonders "does the Lightner double reasoning apply when dummy's first suit is artificial?" This has never been discussed, let us say, but partner finally leads a diamond, and you get your ruff. Now you get off lead with what? A trump would be ok, but you elect to lead a top-of-nothing spade, and soon the declaring side is down 1. Because you use Lightner doubles, you get a top board. The full deal (next column):

	♠AQ ♥AQ98 ♦KQ83 ♣Q43	
♠8654 ♥J64 ♦ ♣KJ10765	D: N V: EW	♠KJ93 ♥10 ♦107542 ♣982
	♠1072 ♥K7532 ♦AJ96 ♣A	

North upgraded to open 2NT. This is not wrong, but today it backfired. The auction might have gone several ways. One suggestion is

1♦-1♥-3♥-4♣-4♦-4NT-3 KC's-6♥

Now South is declarer and you are on lead. Do you double? NO. Let us say you get off to a spade lead. Greedy declarers might finesse thinking it costs nothing, and then partner will win and most certainly lead a diamond. Safer declarers will play the ace of spades and draw trump, giving up a spade at the end. These declarers will play for average or above (knowing the slam won't be bid at every table in a club game) and save the heroics for a less risky situation.

Going back to your double in the actual case. Yes, it gets you a trick you might not otherwise get, but setting the slam requires two tricks. Most frequently, the Lightner double is used when the doubler has a void and a side ace. In today's board, there is no guarantee your side has anything more than the single ruff. Your club suit is a bit porous, North opened 2NT, and partner has passed throughout. On the other hand, no one went looking for the grand slam so partner might have something over there. It's a gamble that your side can find another trick. Today you were shooting; because partner held the spade king, you hit the target. Well done.