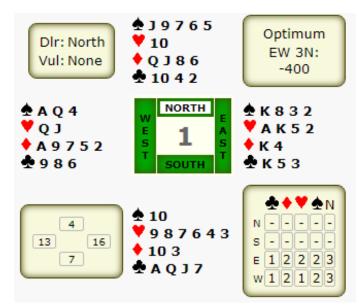
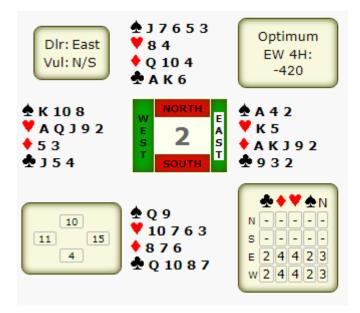
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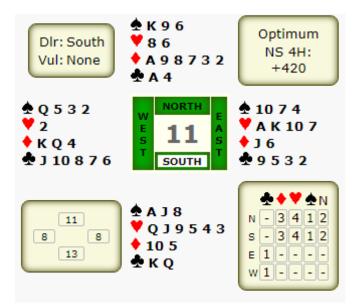
Leads against 3NT



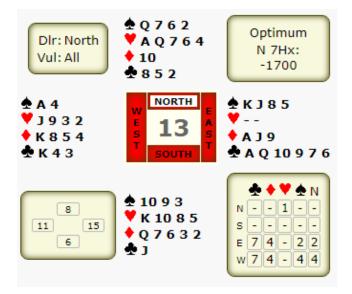
At every table, East played in 3NT. When East has opened a strong 1NT, a heart lead is clear. It should be \checkmark 9 (if you play top of rubbish) or \checkmark 8 if playing second top (best). Never 4th highest, which implies that you hold at least one honour in the suit. If East opens 1 \checkmark , there is still a good case for a passive heart. \clubsuit Q is the textbook lead from South's club holding, but is surely bound to give away the 10th trick, leading to a poor score at pairs.



Defending 3NT, most Souths chose the correct lead of .7. I wondered why three pairs led .Q. Was this a speculative short major? Oh no! The bidding had started 1 - P - 1 - 1 - 1 - 1. North's spade holding is nothing like good enough for a vulnerable overcall (nor a first round NV) and did, of course, encourage the disastrous .Q lead, once again allowing declarer to make overtricks for an excellent pairs score.



When an ambitious NS alight in 3NT played by North, how should EW defend? South has bid hearts so a club looks normal, particularly when holding the top hearts. Playing the right card is so important. Most of us play second top of rubbish, so \$5. West must then encourage with \$8, so that when East gets in, he will not switch. One pair got it spot on.



I was surprised that only one West bid 1 ◆ after East opened 1♣. 5-card major partnerships will prefer 1♥ to 1♦, but for the rest of us 1♦ is the recommended bid, 'cheaper of 4s'. When 3NT is played by West, North has an easy ♥6 opening lead. What should South return? Normal is the original 4th highest in that suit (or top of two remaining). Here, ♥10 looks right. West covers and North wins the trick with ♥Q. What next? North sits and thinks (Yes, I know, Piglet, sometimes he just sits). It looks like declarer has the rest, so you must cash the ♥A, even though it promotes declarer's ♥9. At the table all three NS pairs who had started with a heart, got it right.

James Bentley