

## U3ABD06 MiniBridge Practice Session - Defence

Welcome!

Here is a list of all 20 hands that you could play in today's MiniBridge Practice Session. It tells you useful stuff about them, like the cards in each hand, the High Card Points and the "correct" contract. It focuses on how to defend against each hand; how to defeat the contract! Yes, the tables have turned at last.

**Don't worry too much if some of this goes over your head!** This information is there if you want it, but don't feel bad if it makes no sense right now or is totally different to how you played the hands. You're just getting started; these first few practice sessions are more about getting used to playing on your computer, meeting the other students and your instructors.

To revise the main advice about defending in MiniBridge, have a look at the **U3ABD06 Session Overview** - there's a link on our web site next to the link for THIS document.

Bridge is a great game, but it can be overwhelming, so much to think about. Don't worry, it will get easier. We're here to help it all make sense; don't worry about making mistakes, we're always happy to explain or answer questions. Remember, you're playing with other people who are just starting out, too. Let's have fun together!

-Ed

North	East	South	West
15	7	12	6

	♠ J95		
	♥ AK432		
	♦ AT		
	♣ QJ7		
♠ T3		♠ AK862	
♥ T9		♥ 87	
♦ KQJ92		♦ 653	
♣ T854		♣ 932	
	♠ Q74		
	♥ QJ65		
	♦ 874		
	♣ AK6		

**Board: 1 Dealer: North Lead: ♠A #MD37**

North chooses game in hearts. Partner's ♠AK and our ♦KQJ might together be worth 4 tricks.

East's ♠AK win the first two tricks. West plays ♠T followed by ♠3 and causes the defeat of the contract by collecting a spade ruff at trick 3. Declarer is unable to avoid a subsequent diamond loser and therefore finishes one down.

East knows to give West a spade ruff because of the encouraging high-low signal with his doubleton. Without this guidance East might make an ineffective switch to a minor suit at trick 2 or 3. Declarer claims the rest with his heart and club winners. With our winning diamond, partner's ♠AK and our 3rd round spade ruff we've managed to put the contract one down.

Partner knew to give us a spade ruff because we gave an encouraging high-low signal with our doubleton. Without this he might well have switched to a minor suit at trick 2 or 3.

East	South	West	North
19	5	7	9

	♠ 72		
	♥ 862		
	♦ K73		
	♣ AQ754		
♠ QT653		♠ AJ	
♥ QT93		♥ AKJ74	
♦ 862		♦ AJ9	
♣ K		♣ J32	
	♠ K984		
	♥ 5		
	♦ QT54		
	♣ T986		

**Board: 2 Dealer: East Lead: ♣T #MD123**

East chooses game in hearts.

North is clearly going to win the first trick. How can the defence find 3 more tricks to defeat the contract?

If South has ♠A or ♠K he'll win a trick with that card whether or not North leads a spade now. If, however, South has some strength in diamonds North needs to attack the suit straight away by leading towards dummy's weakness. He leads low from 3 to an honour to tell South that he has an honour in the suit.

Declarer plays ♦9 and South wins with ♦T. South returns the suit to North's ♦K and declarer's ♦A. After drawing some trumps declarer takes the spade finesse, but South wins and cashes ♦Q to defeat the contract by one trick. We defeated the contract by switching to dummy's weak suit at trick 2. We led a low diamond in order to retain our ♦K for partner's low diamond continuation. Declarer had to try the spade finesse, but went down when it lost and partner was able to cash ♦Q.

South	West	North	East
12	5	8	15

♠ Q  
 ♥ T8643  
 ♦ 754  
 ♣ AQ75

♠ T9843  
 ♥  
 ♦ A932  
 ♣ J962

♠ KJ762  
 ♥ KQ  
 ♦ KT8  
 ♣ KT8

♠ A5  
 ♥ AJ9752  
 ♦ QJ6  
 ♣ 43

**Board: 3 Dealer: South Lead: ♠T #MD169**

South chooses game in hearts.

When East sees dummy he reasons that his partner's spade lead probably hasn't helped much, but the defence might still be able to take four tricks in the other suits if West can provide a little help.

Dummy's ♠Q is covered by East's ♠K and declarer's ♠A.

Declarer ruffs a spade in dummy, plays a heart to his ♥A and loses a heart to East. West is void in hearts and discards ♠4 followed by ♠8. What should East lead to trick 5?

Declarer has deliberately put East on lead in the hope of gaining an advantage from his next play. How can East get off lead safely?

The only missing spade is ♠9 and it should be clear that West holds that card, since he wouldn't have led ♠T from an original holding of ♠T843. East therefore shouldn't lead a spade, since this would concede a ruff and discard.

He therefore has to choose between his two KT8 suits. East obviously don't want to lead away from his ♣K into dummy's ♣AQ.

This leaves only diamonds. Even if East's play turns out to be taking a finesse for declarer, he would have been able to do the same himself, so a diamond lead can't give away a trick. East leads low in case declarer has a guess in the suit.

When declarer plays ♦J West wins with ♦A and returns the suit to East's ♦K. East exits safely with his last diamond and later wins the setting trick with ♣K when declarer finesses ♣Q unsuccessfully. Declarer couldn't avoid the club finesse and went one down when it lost.

We defeated the contract by playing diamonds each time we were on lead. Declarer was able to win the third round with ♦Q, but by playing safely we were able to defeat the contract with our ♣K.

**West North East South**

15 9 11 5

	♠ KQ	
	♥ Q98	
	♦ Q875	
	♣ T743	
♠ T8654		♠ AJ97
♥ KJ75		♥ A63
♦ AK9		♦ 432
♣ A		♣ Q85
	♠ 32	
	♥ T42	
	♦ JT6	
	♣ KJ962	

**Board: 4 Dealer: West Lead: ♦5 #MD297**

After West chooses game in spades, South finds it difficult to assess defensive prospects on this hand. His partner will probably need to be strong in the red suits if the defence is to defeat this contract. In the meantime, which diamond should South play to trick 1?

It's very important for South to play ♦T, not ♦J. Why?

In general, when following suit a defender should play the lowest of two or more equal cards. This may sometimes allow his partner to work out the defender's holding from declarer's subsequent play. When a defender plays any high card, his partner can deduce that he doesn't have the card immediately below. This information can be invaluable when planning the subsequent defence.

Note 1: this doesn't violate the proverb "Third Hand High".

Note 2: this convention is the opposite to that used for leading a suit, where a defender plays the highest from equals.

Declarer wins the first trick with ♦A and plays two rounds of trumps. North wins the second round (having started with ♠KQ doubleton) and continues diamonds to South's ♦J and declarer's ♦K. North later gets on lead with ♥Q and cashes ♦Q, after which declarer claims the rest.

The contract still makes exactly, but the defence managed to stop the overtrick by their attack on diamonds, thanks to South's play of ♦T to the first trick. If he had made the mistake of playing ♦J (denying ♦T) North would have switched to clubs at trick 4 and declarer would have made eleven tricks. Declarer claims the rest, stating that he will ruff his small heart in dummy if necessary. He makes the contract exactly, but the defence couldn't have done any better. Partner stopped the overtrick by leading a diamond and continuing the suit.

We played our part by playing ♦T at trick 1, the lowest of equals. This told partner that a second diamond lead was safe.

**North East South West**

21 8 9 2

	♠ Q74	
	♥ AKQ	
	♦ AK6	
	♣ K832	
♠ 6		♠ JT985
♥ 987632		♥ T5
♦ Q8743		♦ T52
♣ 6		♣ AQJ
	♠ AK32	
	♥ J4	
	♦ J9	
	♣ T9754	

**Board: 5 Dealer: North Lead: ♠J #MD419**

North chooses game in No Trumps.

East has a safe attacking lead in the form of ♠J, top of a four-card sequence. Dummy wins with ♠K, West following with ♠6 and declarer with ♠4. At trick 2 declarer runs dummy's ♣T to East's ♣J. What should he lead to trick 3?

It would be a serious mistake to cash ♣A. This would allow declarer to make three club tricks and eleven in all. Instead East continues the attack on spades by leading ♠T. Dummy wins with ♠A and West discards ♥2.

Declarer plays a club to his ♣K and East's ♣A. What should East lead to trick 5?

Again it would be wrong for East to cash his club winner. He keeps plugging away at spades, this time setting up his ♠85 as winners.

Declarer cashes ♥AKQ, on which East naturally discards ♦2.

Declarer continues with ♦AK, but has to concede the rest.

Despite North and South having 31 points between them, declarer was unable to make the contract. Declarer can't make any more tricks and concedes one down.

We achieved this result by leading spades at every opportunity. Declarer then didn't have time to set up his clubs and made only eight tricks, despite EW having a combined 30 points.

**East South West North**

14 12 13 1

♠ J98742

♥ 975

♦ 73

♣ 86

♠ 653

♥ K84

♦ QJT64

♣ AK

♠ AK

♥ AQJ6

♦ 952

♣ T973

♠ QT

♥ T32

♦ AK8

♣ QJ542

**Board: 6 Dealer: East Lead: ♣4 #MD510**

East chooses game in No Trumps and North has announced 1 point.

South can't expect his partner to provide much help to defeat this contract. Can you find an opening lead that provides some chances?

A 5-card suit is often a good attacking lead against a NT contract. South leads 4th highest because he doesn't have a sequence or near-sequence of three high cards.

Declarer wins the opening lead in dummy and enters hand with ♥ K. He continues with ♦ 2. Should South play high or low? If he wins, which card should he lead to trick 4?

It would be a mistake for South to let dummy win a diamond trick. Declarer might then have enough top winners for his contract.

South therefore wins with ♦ K and uses ♣ 2 to knock out dummy's remaining club stopper. He wins the next diamond and cashes ♣ QJ5 to defeat the contract. We defeated the contract by leading low from our 5 card suit and subsequently winning ♦ AK to set up and cash our long suit.

**South West North East**

14 10 14 2

♠ AK4

♥ K9

♦ T9864

♣ A73

♠ QT3

♥ QJT82

♦ KQ7

♣ 96

♠ 8752

♥ 43

♦ 3

♣ QT8542

♠ J96

♥ A765

♦ AJ52

♣ KJ

**Board: 7 Dealer: South Lead: ♥Q #MD519**

South chooses game in No Trumps.

Which opening lead from West gives the defence the best chance of defeating this No Trump contract?

The best opening lead is from West's strong 5 card suit. With a sequence of three honours he leads the highest of these, rather than fourth best.

Dummy's ♥ K wins the first trick. Declarer continues by running ♦ T around to West's ♦ Q. Which card should he lead to trick 3?

The play to the first trick indicates that declarer holds ♥ A, but dummy's now-bare 9 means that West can use his remaining ♥ JT8 to set up at least two tricks in the suit. It doesn't really matter which honour he leads.

Declarer wins in hand and leads ♦ A followed by ♦ J. West wins with ♦ K and gratefully cashes his remaining hearts to defeat the contract. Declarer easily has the rest of the tricks, but we've already won two tricks in diamonds and three in hearts to defeat the contract by one trick.

We achieved this optimal result by starting with the top of the sequence in our longest suit and playing the suit from the top when we got back on lead.

**West North East South**

16 10 11 3

♠ T5  
♥ K5  
♦ KQ753  
♣ Q972

♠ K4  
♥ AJT84  
♦ A92  
♣ A85

♠ A873  
♥ Q9  
♦ J84  
♣ KJ63

♠ QJ962  
♥ 7632  
♦ T6  
♣ T4

**Board: 8 Dealer: West Lead: ♦5 #MD521**

West chooses game in No Trumps.

North will need some help from his partner if the defence is to defeat this contract. Which opening lead provides the best chance of doing so?

The best chance of defeating the contract is for North to set up his diamond suit. With only two honours North starts with his fourth highest.

When declarer plays low from dummy South can use his ♦T to force out declarer's ♦A. Declarer enters dummy in spades to finesse in hearts, but North wins with ♥K and cashes four tricks in diamonds to defeat the contract by one.

Declarer could have made the contract by playing dummy's ♦J at trick 1, but understandably played low from dummy hoping that we held ♦T (a 50% chance) rather than ♦KQ (a 25% chance). If North had made the mistake of leading ♦K at trick 1 declarer would have made no fewer than eleven tricks. We defeated the contract by leading the fourth highest of our longest and strongest suit. Declarer could have made the contract by playing dummy's ♦J at trick 1, but understandably played low from dummy hoping that we held ♦T (a 50% chance) rather than ♦KQ (a 25% chance).

**North East South West**

15 7 11 7

♠ AKJ72  
♥ QJ5  
♦ 82  
♣ A83

♠ Q5  
♥ 92  
♦ K74  
♣ QT9762

♠ 83  
♥ AKT743  
♦ 9653  
♣ 5

♠ T964  
♥ 86  
♦ AQJT  
♣ KJ4

**Board: 9 Dealer: North Lead: ♥A #MD1001**

North chooses game in spades.

The defence need 4 tricks to beat the contract.

East's opening lead of the Ace promises the King. The defence will get two tricks in hearts and West's ♦K will win when declarer tries the finesse.

Where will the 4th trick come from?

The key play is for West to signal encouragement on East's opening lead of ♥A by playing ♥9. East then cashes ♥K and leads a third heart for West to overruff dummy.

If West plays ♥2 on East's ♥A, East may decide it is not safe to continue with hearts and West won't score the ruff to defeat the contract. At this point declarer claims the rest, 3 spades, 3 diamonds and a club, but we have defeated the contract. The key play was signalling encouragement on partner's opening lead of ♥A.

If we had played ♥2 on partner's ♥A, partner may have decided it was not safe to continue with hearts and we wouldn't have scored the ruff to defeat the contract.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

1. The opening lead of the Ace promises the King.
2. Signal 'high-low' on partner's opening lead of the Ace to encourage partner to continue leading the suit.

**East South West North**

15 7 11 7

♠ KJ4		♠ A83
♥ T964		♥ AKJ72
♦ 86		♦ QJ5
♣ AQJT		♣ 82
	♠ 5	
	♥ 83	
	♦ AKT743	
	♣ 9653	

**Board: 10 Dealer: East Lead: ♦A #MD1009**

East chooses game in hearts.

The defence need 4 tricks to beat the contract.

South has a nice straightforward lead of ♦A, but when dummy goes down there's more than one plausible way to continue.

The key point to this hand is to notice North's attitude signal on tricks 1 and 2.

North plays high-low in order to encourage South to continue leading diamonds. South can see that dummy can ruff diamonds but he must trust North's signal. South therefore plays a third round of diamonds, expecting North to overruff.

Note that if North was unable to overruff he would not have given an encouragement signal. At this point declarer claims the rest but we have defeated the contract.

The key point to this hand was noticing partner's attitude signal on tricks 1 and 2.

Partner played high-low to encourage us to continue leading diamonds. We can see that dummy can ruff diamonds but we must trust partner's signal, expecting him to overruff.

Note that if partner was unable to overruff he did not need to give us an encouragement signal.

**South West North East**

15 9 11 5

♠ KQ		♠ 32
♥ Q98		♥ T42
♦ Q875		♦ JT6
♣ T743		♣ KJ962
	♠ T8654	
	♥ KJ75	
	♦ AK9	
	♣ A	

**Board: 11 Dealer: South Lead: ♦5 #MD297**

After South chooses game in spades, East finds it difficult to assess defensive prospects on this hand. His partner will probably need to be strong in the red suits if the defence is to defeat this contract. In the meantime, which diamond should East play to trick 1?

It's very important for East to play ♦T, not ♦J. Why?

In general, when following suit a defender should play the losouth of two or more equal cards. This may sometimes allow his partner to work out the defender's holding from declarer's subsequent play. When a defender plays any high card, his partner can deduce that he doesn't have the card immediately below. This information can be invaluable when planning the subsequent defence.

Note 1: this doesn't violate the proverb "Third Hand High".

Note 2: this convention is the opposite to that used for leading a suit, where a defender plays the highest from equals.

Declarer wins the first trick with ♦A and plays two rounds of trumps. West wins the second round (having started with ♠KQ doubleton) and continues diamonds to East's ♦J and declarer's ♦K. West later gets on lead with ♥Q and cashes ♦Q, after which declarer claims the rest.

The contract still makes exactly, but the defence managed to stop the overtrick by their attack on diamonds, thanks to East's play of ♦T to the first trick. If he had made the mistake of playing ♦J (denying ♦T) West would have switched to clubs at trick 4 and declarer would have made eleven tricks. Declarer claims the rest, stating that he will ruff his small heart in dummy if necessary. He makes the contract exactly, but the defence couldn't have done any better. Partner stopped the overtrick by leading a diamond and continuing the suit.

We played our part by playing ♦T at trick 1, the losouth of equals. This told partner that a second diamond lead was safe.



**West North East South**

15 7 12 6

♠ AK862

♥ 87

♦ 653

♣ 932

♠ J95

♥ AK432

♦ AT

♣ QJ7

♠ Q74

♥ QJ65

♦ 874

♣ AK6

♠ T3

♥ T9

♦ KQJ92

♣ T854

**Board: 12 Dealer: West Lead: ♠A #MD37**

West chooses game in hearts. Partner's ♠AK and our ♦KQJ might together be worth 4 tricks.

North's ♠AK win the first two tricks. South plays ♠T followed by ♠3 and causes the defeat of the contract by collecting a spade ruff at trick 3. Declarer is unable to avoid a subsequent diamond loser and therefore finishes one down.

North knows to give South a spade ruff because of the encouraging high-low signal with his doubleton. Without this guidance North might make an ineffective switch to a minor suit at trick 2 or 3. Declarer claims the rest with his heart and club winners. With our winning diamond, partner's ♠AK and our 3rd round spade ruff we've managed to put the contract one down. Partner knew to give us a spade ruff because we gave an encouraging high-low signal with our doubleton. Without this he might well have switched to a minor suit at trick 2 or 3.

**North East South West**

19 5 7 9

♠ AJ

♥ AKJ74

♦ AJ9

♣ J32

♠ 72

♥ 862

♦ K73

♣ AQ754

♠ K984

♥ 5

♦ QT54

♣ T986

♠ QT653

♥ QT93

♦ 862

♣ K

**Board: 13 Dealer: North Lead: ♣T #MD123**

North chooses game in hearts.

West is clearly going to win the first trick. How can the defence find 3 more tricks to defeat the contract?

If East has ♠A or ♠K he'll win a trick with that card whether or not West leads a spade now. If, however, East has some strength in diamonds West needs to attack the suit straight away by leading towards dummy's weakness. He leads low from 3 to an honour to tell East that he has an honour in the suit.

Declarer plays ♦9 and East wins with ♦T. East returns the suit to West's ♦K and declarer's ♦A. After drawing some trumps declarer takes the spade finesse, but East wins and cashes ♦Q to defeat the contract by one trick. We defeated the contract by switching to dummy's weak suit at trick 2. We led a low diamond in order to retain our ♦K for partner's low diamond continuation. Declarer had to try the spade finesse, but went down when it lost and partner was able to cash ♦Q.

**East South West North**

12 5 8 15

	♠ KJ762	
	♥ KQ	
	♦ KT8	
	♣ KT8	
♠ Q		♠ A5
♥ T8643		♥ AJ9752
♦ 754		♦ QJ6
♣ AQ75		♣ 43
	♠ T9843	
	♥	
	♦ A932	
	♣ J962	

**Board: 14 Dealer: East Lead: ♠T #MD169**

East chooses game in hearts.

When North sees dummy he reasons that his partner's spade lead probably hasn't helped much, but the defence might still be able to take four tricks in the other suits if South can provide a little help.

Dummy's ♠Q is covered by North's ♠K and declarer's ♠A.

Declarer ruffs a spade in dummy, plays a heart to his ♥A and loses a heart to North. South is void in hearts and discards ♠4 followed by ♠8. What should North lead to trick 5?

Declarer has deliberately put North on lead in the hope of gaining an advantage from his next play. How can North get off lead safely?

The only missing spade is ♠9 and it should be clear that South holds that card, since he wouldn't have led ♠T from an original holding of ♠T843. North therefore shouldn't lead a spade, since this would concede a ruff and discard.

He therefore has to choose between his two KT8 suits. North obviously don't want to lead away from his ♣K into dummy's ♣AQ.

This leaves only diamonds. Even if North's play turns out to be taking a finesse for declarer, he would have been able to do the same himself, so a diamond lead can't give away a trick. North leads low in case declarer has a guess in the suit.

When declarer plays ♦J South wins with ♦A and returns the suit to North's ♦K. North exits safely with his last diamond and later wins the setting trick with ♣K when declarer finesses ♣Q unsuccessfully. Declarer couldn't avoid the club finesse and went one down when it lost.

We defeated the contract by playing diamonds each time we were on lead. Declarer was able to win the third round with ♦Q, but by playing safely we were able to defeat the contract with our ♣K.

**South West North East**

15 7 11 7

	♠ KJ4	
	♥ T964	
	♦ 86	
	♣ AQJT	
♠ 5		♠ QT9762
♥ 83		♥ Q5
♦ AKT743		♦ 92
♣ 9653		♣ K74
	♠ A83	
	♥ AKJ72	
	♦ QJ5	
	♣ 82	

**Board: 15 Dealer: South Lead: ♦A #MD1009**

South chooses game in hearts.

The defence need 4 tricks to beat the contract.

West has a nice straightforward lead of ♦A, but when dummy goes down there's more than one plausible way to continue.

The key point to this hand is to notice East's attitude signal on tricks 1 and 2.

East plays high-low in order to encourage West to continue leading diamonds. West can see that dummy can ruff diamonds but he must trust East's signal. West therefore plays a third round of diamonds, expecting East to overruff.

Note that if East was unable to overruff he would not have given an encouragement signal. At this point declarer claims the rest but we have defeated the contract.

The key point to this hand was noticing partner's attitude signal on tricks 1 and 2.

Partner played high-low to encourage us to continue leading diamonds. We can see that dummy can ruff diamonds but we must trust partner's signal, expecting him to overruff.

Note that if partner was unable to overruff he did not need to give us an encouragement signal.



**West North East South**

21 8 9 2

♠ JT985

♥ T5

♦ T52

♣ AQJ

♠ Q74

♥ AKQ

♦ AK6

♣ K832

♠ AK32

♥ J4

♦ J9

♣ T9754

♠ 6

♥ 987632

♦ Q8743

♣ 6

**Board: 16 Dealer: West Lead: ♠J #MD419**

West chooses game in No Trumps.

North has a safe attacking lead in the form of ♠J, top of a four-card sequence. Dummy wins with ♠K, South following with ♠6 and declarer with ♠4. At trick 2 declarer runs dummy's ♣T to North's ♣J. What should he lead to trick 3?

It would be a serious mistake to cash ♣A. This would allow declarer to make three club tricks and eleven in all. Instead North continues the attack on spades by leading ♠T. Dummy wins with ♠A and South discards ♥2.

Declarer plays a club to his ♣K and North's ♣A. What should North lead to trick 5?

Again it would be wrong for North to cash his club winner. He keeps plugging away at spades, this time setting up his ♠85 as winners.

Declarer cashes ♥AKQ, on which North naturally discards ♦2.

Declarer continues with ♦AK, but has to concede the rest.

Despite West and East having 31 points between them, declarer was unable to make the contract. Declarer can't make any more tricks and concedes one down.

We achieved this result by leading spades at every opportunity. Declarer then didn't have time to set up his clubs and made only eight tricks, despite EW having a combined 30 points.

**North East South West**

14 12 13 1

♠ AK

♥ AQJ6

♦ 952

♣ T973

♠ J98742

♥ 975

♦ 73

♣ 86

♠ QT

♥ T32

♦ AK8

♣ QJ542

♠ 653

♥ K84

♦ QJT64

♣ AK

**Board: 17 Dealer: North Lead: ♣4 #MD510**

North chooses game in No Trumps and West has announced 1 point.

East can't expect his partner to provide much help to defeat this contract. Can you find an opening lead that provides some chances?

A 5-card suit is often a good attacking lead against a NT contract. East leads 4th highest because he doesn't have a sequence or near-sequence of three high cards.

Declarer wins the opening lead in dummy and enters hand with ♥K. He continues with ♦2. Should East play high or low? If he wins, which card should he lead to trick 4?

It would be a mistake for East to let dummy win a diamond trick. Declarer might then have enough top winners for his contract.

East therefore wins with ♦K and uses ♣2 to knock out dummy's remaining club stopper. He wins the next diamond and cashes ♣QJ5 to defeat the contract. We defeated the contract by leading low from our 5 card suit and subsequently winning ♦AK to set up and cash our long suit.

**East South West North**

14 10 14 2

♠ 8752

♥ 43

♦ 3

♣ QT8542

♠ AK4

♥ K9

♦ T9864

♣ A73

♠ J96

♥ A765

♦ AJ52

♣ KJ

♠ QT3

♥ QJT82

♦ KQ7

♣ 96

**Board: 18 Dealer: East Lead: ♥Q #MD519**

East chooses game in No Trumps.

Which opening lead from South gives the defence the best chance of defeating this No Trump contract?

The best opening lead is from South's strong 5 card suit. With a sequence of three honours he leads the highest of these, rather than fourth best.

Dummy's ♥K wins the first trick. Declarer continues by running ♦T around to South's ♦Q. Which card should he lead to trick 3?

The play to the first trick indicates that declarer holds ♥A, but dummy's now-bare 9 means that South can use his remaining ♥JT8 to set up at least two tricks in the suit. It doesn't really matter which honour he leads.

Declarer wins in hand and leads ♦A followed by ♦J. South wins with ♦K and gratefully cashes his remaining hearts to defeat the contract. Declarer easily has the rest of the tricks, but we've already won two tricks in diamonds and three in hearts to defeat the contract by one trick.

We achieved this optimal result by starting with the top of the sequence in our longest suit and playing the suit from the top when we got back on lead.

**South West North East**

16 10 11 3

♠ A873

♥ Q9

♦ J84

♣ KJ63

♠ T5

♥ K5

♦ KQ753

♣ Q972

♠ QJ962

♥ 7632

♦ T6

♣ T4

♠ K4

♥ AJT84

♦ A92

♣ A85

**Board: 19 Dealer: South Lead: ♦5 #MD521**

South chooses game in No Trumps.

West will need some help from his partner if the defence is to defeat this contract. Which opening lead provides the best chance of doing so?

The best chance of defeating the contract is for West to set up his diamond suit. With only two honours West starts with his fourth highest.

When declarer plays low from dummy East can use his ♦T to force out declarer's ♦A. Declarer enters dummy in spades to finesse in hearts, but West wins with ♥K and cashes four tricks in diamonds to defeat the contract by one.

Declarer could have made the contract by playing dummy's ♦J at trick 1, but understandably played low from dummy hoping that we held ♦T (a 50% chance) rather than ♦KQ (a 25% chance). If West had made the mistake of leading ♦K at trick 1 declarer would have made no fewer than eleven tricks. We defeated the contract by leading the fourth highest of our longest and strongest suit. Declarer could have made the contract by playing dummy's ♦J at trick 1, but understandably played low from dummy hoping that we held ♦T (a 50% chance) rather than ♦KQ (a 25% chance).

**West North East South**

15 7 11 7

♠ 83

♥ AKT743

♦ 9653

♣ 5

♠ AKJ72

♥ QJ5

♦ 82

♣ A83

♠ T964

♥ 86

♦ AQJT

♣ KJ4

♠ Q5

♥ 92

♦ K74

♣ QT9762

**Board: 20 Dealer: West Lead: ♥A #MD1001**

West chooses game in spades.

The defence need 4 tricks to beat the contract.

North's opening lead of the Ace promises the King. The defence will get two tricks in hearts and South's ♦K will win when declarer tries the finesse.

Where will the 4th trick come from?

The key play is for South to signal encouragement on North's opening lead of ♥A by playing ♥9. North then cashes ♥K and leads a third heart for South to overruff dummy.

If South plays ♥2 on North's ♥A, North may decide it is not safe to continue with hearts and South won't score the ruff to defeat the contract. At this point declarer claims the rest, 3 spades, 3 diamonds and a club, but we have defeated the contract.

The key play was signalling encouragement on partner's opening lead of ♥A.

If we had played ♥2 on partner's ♥A, partner may have decided it was not safe to continue with hearts and we wouldn't have scored the ruff to defeat the contract.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

1. The opening lead of the Ace promises the King.
2. Signal 'high-low' on partner's opening lead of the Ace to encourage partner to continue leading the suit.