

BRIDGE BITES

from The American Contract Bridge League

A THOUGHTFUL LEAD

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	♠ AQT6 ♥ 76 ♦ T976 ♣ QT2	
♠ 752 ♥ AQ93 ♦ 854 ♣ K43	North West East Declarer	♠ KJ98 ♥ J854 ♦ J2 ♣ 876
	♠ 43 ♥ KT2 ♦ AKQ3 ♣ AJ95	

None Vulnerable

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

South's 1NT showed 15-17 HCP so, when North invited game with 2NT, South readily accepted with his top-of-the-line 17-point maximum. After this auction, looking at the West hand only, what would be your opening lead?

Against No Trump contracts, conventional wisdom says "Fourth best from your longest and strongest" and, without pausing for thought, many Wests would follow this advice and lead a low Heart. But that doesn't work out well on this particular deal. Declarer wins the trick, cashes his Diamonds (ending in Dummy), and runs the ♣Q around to West's King. Now the defense cashes the Hearts but that is all they get and Declarer has his nine tricks.

A more thoughtful West might conclude that perhaps a passive lead is required. **Thought 1:** There is a good chance that the ♥K is to West's right in Declarer's strong hand. If so, then an opening Heart lead will blow a trick. **Thought 2:** N-S reached game via an invitational sequence, so the contract may be a close-run thing. Why run the risk of handing Declarer his 9th trick with an aggressive lead? **Thought 3:** Even if it happens that East has the ♥K, it is somewhat unlikely that the suit will provide more than four tricks for the defense. That being the case, maybe the defense can afford to be patient.

So, with no guarantee of success (opening leads really are something of a crap shoot), West guesses to start with the "top-of-nothing" Spade Seven. Let's savor the ensuing carnage! Declarer finesses Dummy's ♠Q (or ♠T), won by East. Back comes a Heart won by West's Queen. Then another Spade, taken by Dummy's Ace (Declarer cannot afford another Heart lead from East). The Club finesse loses, and now the defense reels off a bunch of major suit winners. The bottom line is down four!

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