

Finding an opening lead against 1NT

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Defending against a 1NT contract is difficult. That's particularly true if you have a strong hand with no long suit and have to make the opening lead. Then there's every chance that your lead will donate a trick to declarer, plus that you'll get endplayed repeatedly and have to keep leading away from your honours.

That was the situation on this deal from the final of the Min Grey Pairs on Saturday 22 August. With both sides vulnerable, East passes and South opens 1NT. As West, you hold:

♠K65
♥KJ92
♦AT9
♣A32

You must not double – where are your defensive tricks coming from? However, if 1NT is now passed out, what should you lead?

There's no easy answer. Leading from the king in either major suit has the potential to be straight into declarer's ace-queen and you might never win a trick in the suit. How about leading from one of your 3-card minor suits? Both are headed by the ace and at least the ace will always win a trick eventually ... but which minor?

With little to guide you, my rule of thumb is that if you lead from your worse suit there's a marginally greater chance that partner will have something useful. On this deal, that means leading a low club. The rule of thumb turned out to be true:

BD: 26 ♠T432 Dlr: E
♥QT53 Vul: ALL
♦753
♣T9

♠K65	♠QJ
♥KJ92	♥764
♦AT9	♦K64
♣A32	♣J8654

♠A987
♥A8
♦QJ82
♣KQ7

					N	
	♣	♦	♥	♠	T	
N				1		2
S				1	15	7
E	3	1	1		1	16
W	2	1	1		1	

It's very difficult to achieve the perfect defence to set the contract by two tricks, but one down is certainly feasible after attacking clubs at trick one. On any other lead, declarer has a reasonable chance of making 1NT.

However, South really should not have been playing in a 1NT contract. North has a rotten hand, only a doubleton club and both 4-card majors, so assuming that North-South are playing simple Stayman, North should bid 2C and pass whatever South rebids. This approach is known as "garbage" Stayman and this time around would find a 4-4 fit in spades, with good prospects of making if the defence doesn't get everything just right.



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