

## The Real Deal

by Larry Cohen



Larry Cohen, a many-time National champion, recently won the Silodor Open Pairs for a third time at the ACBL Spring North American Championships held in Houston.

One of Larry's favorite teaching methods is to analyze random deals. He feels that any time you deal out a deck of cards, there are numerous lessons that can be learned.

In the previous issue, we had a competitive auction, but this time North-South bid with no interference. East passes as dealer, and South has a routine 1NT opening. Only a few teachers are still holdouts from the old era when 16–18 was the range for 1NT. The modern way is 15–17. West would need more shape or more high cards to consider anything other than Pass. So the auction begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		Pass	1NT
Pass	?		

North is looking at 11 high-card points, so there are 26–28 combined points—enough for game, but not slam. The only question is: Which Game?

North starts out by using the Stayman convention, looking for a 4–4 fit in a major suit. North bids 2♣, but South has no major. South has to answer 2♦.

North might briefly consider reaching game in diamonds. South's 2♦ bid didn't say anything about diamonds, of course. In fact, South could have as few as two diamonds! How can that be? With three cards in each major, two diamonds, and five clubs, South would surely open 1NT if in range, and in response to Stayman would bid 2♦.

Admittedly, with no four-card major South rates to have diamond length—as on the actual deal, where South has four. However, there is no practical way to explore for 5♦. North might shrug—mentally—, but really has no choice other than to bid 3NT with the unbalanced hand.

♥A? I don't mind leading away from aces at notrump—but never against suit contracts. So a heart lead is surely possible.

Another good policy is “When in doubt, prefer to lead a major instead of a minor.” You know that your opponents would have found a 4–4 heart fit if they had one. So they don't have more than seven hearts. On the other hand, if you lead a minor, they might have plenty of those. For example, on this deal, North-South have an eight-card diamond fit, but nobody looks for minor-suit fits on these auctions.

So would I lead a heart? It is not clear. I feel biased since I'm looking at the entire deal! Maybe you can give this problem to a few friends without their knowing the deal, and ask which suit they would lead.

If you do lead a heart, which one should you lead? When you have a sequence, that overrides the usual consideration against notrump of “fourth best.” Any three cards in a row are considered a sequence when leading against notrump.

If they are the highest three in the suit, such as ♥Q–J–10–8 or ♥10–9–8–3, you lead the top—never fourth best. Even in this deal, where the sequence is not at the top, you still lead top of the sequence. In this case,

we call it an “interior sequence.” So, from ♥A–10–9–8, the proper lead is the ♥10, not the ♥8. From ♥A–J–10–9, you lead the ♥J; from ♥Q–10–9–8, the ♥10.

As you can see from looking at all four hands, a heart lead is not best for the defense. Declarer would win the ♥K or ♥J, and probably work on the longest combined suit, diamonds.

This diamond suit presents a “two-way” guess for the ♦Q. This means that the finesse can be taken

THE REAL DEAL												
DEAL: 2	NORTH	♠	A J 5 4									
DLR: E		♥	Q 7 4 2									
VUL: N-S		♦	K J 8 4									
		♣	4									
WEST		EAST										
♠	Q 8	♠	9 6 3 2									
♥	A 10 9 8	♥	6 3									
♦	Q 7 6	♦	5 3									
♣	Q 10 9 6	♣	K J 8 5 3									
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	N											
W	E											
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	SOUTH											
	♠		K 10 7									
	♥		K J 5									
	♦		A 10 9 2									
	♣		A 7 2									

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		Pass	1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

## OPENING LEAD: ??

As usual, a lot rides on the opening lead. Against notrump, the normal policy is “fourth from your longest and strongest.” Here there are some conflicts for West.

The longest suit is a tie between hearts and clubs. The stronger is hearts. Should West lead from the

in either direction (see box). You can lead the ♦A from your hand, and then the ♦10 for finesse through West. Or, you can lead a diamond to dummy's ♦K, and lead the ♦J for a finesse through East.

Which way should you go? The only thing to go by is that West seems to have heart length. So maybe the other player has diamond length, and you can play East for the ♦Q. There is so little to go by, that I'd say if you have a hunch, or are a good guesser, then go with it! I'll bet that all of you reading would guess right, since you can see all 52 cards!

If you guess diamonds correctly, you can then turn your attention to spades. Again, there is a two-way guess for a queen, but even if you lose a trick to the ♠Q, you will have three spade tricks to go with a heart trick, four diamonds, and a club. If you guess the location of the ♠Q, you can then promote an extra heart trick. Any declarer who's queen locator is working well, will get a great result on this deal!

If you misguess diamonds, and the defenders then lead a club, you will have to guess spades to make the contract: four spades, a heart, three diamonds, and a club.

After leading the ♠K, declarer must lead the ♠7, not the ♠10. If declarer leads the ♠10, West's ♠Q appears, and declarer wins dummy's ♠A. The ♠J is a third trick, but East's ♠9 is now the highest remaining spade.

Of course, we haven't considered a club lead. Many Wests will choose to lead a club, the ♣10—there's that top of an interior sequence again.

What a symmetrical deal! West can lead the ♥10 or ♣10, both the top card of an interior sequence. Meanwhile, declarer can guess either opponent for the ♦Q or ♠Q.

On a club lead, declarer is up against it once the ♣A is driven out. Declarer needs to guess the location of both queens to get nine tricks. Good luck!

### Summary

Even though 5♦ might be a better contract, it is very normal to reach 3NT following a Stayman auction. The opening lead is a big guess. A club lead works out much better than a heart lead. In both case, take note of the "interior sequence."

On any lead, declarer needs to be a good guesser. Both the ♠Q and ♦Q are there for the taking, if declarer has a lucky day. This deal is more about luck than skill. ♠♦

### THE TWO-WAY FINESSE

There are many stories about two-way finesses for a queen. Consider the standard layout:

	NORTH	
	♥ A 3 2	
WEST		EAST
	SOUTH	
	♥ K J 10	

Declarer wants to take three tricks. Declarer can play the ♥K and lead the ♥J to finesse through West. Or, declarer can play the ♥A and lead a low heart to finesse through East.

Experts have many ways to figure out which defender holds the ♥Q. One sure thing is to get the defenders to lead the suit. If either East or West leads the suit, you get three tricks automatically.

Some of the all-time great players claim to have "never" misguessed in this situation. I suspect this is an overbid.

Some players always finesse the same way, so they don't drive themselves crazy by zigging and zagging. An old rubber-bridge tactic is to always assume the Queen lies after the Jack. This has some validity. When the cards from a trick are stacked together, the Queen will often end up on top of the Jack, because the Jack got covered by the Queen or lost to the Queen—but never the other way around. If the cards are then not shuffled properly, indeed the Queen will be in the hand to the left of the Jack on the next deal.

The best advice I can give at duplicate bridge is to lead the ♥J from your hand. West will often cover—cover an honor with an honor—and your problems are solved. If West hesitates and plays low, assume West has the ♥Q and let the ♥J run. If West plays low without a care, assume West doesn't have the ♥Q. Go up with the ♥A and finesse the other way.

It is completely ethical to rely on the opponents' tempo, but it would be unethical for West to hesitate when the ♥J is led when West doesn't hold the ♥Q.



The Real Deal was dealt by **Hazel Wolpert**, who has enjoyed an outstanding bridge career. She has represented Canada internationally. She established and operates one of the most sophisticated full-time clubs in North America, and she recently received the Audrey Grant Award for excellence in teaching. Larry reminds us that 'Wolpert' is a familiar name in bridge. "I know her son, Gavin, a frequent teammate and opponent. His beautiful and talented wife, Jenny, has also been my teammate." *(Photo courtesy of Jonathan Steinberg)*