

BRIDGE TIP: OPENING LEAD IN NOTRUMP

You are sitting in the West and the bidding has started by your left hand opponent.

West
 ♠KQ953
 ♥A876
 ♦J76
 ♣J

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♥	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

You are on lead for this 3NT contract. Your spades aren't good enough for an attacking lead in the declarer first bid suit. The fact that your partner didn't have enough to overcall 1♦ dissuades you from leading a diamond. You turn to your hearts. North, the dummy, has shown a heart stopper but the opponents are going to get a lot of tricks in the clubs suit, so by a process of illumination, hearts have the best chance of collecting enough tricks to set the contract before they take their nine tricks. You make the standard heart lead of the ♥6, the 4th down.

The dummy appears:

North
 ♠A
 ♥KJ95
 ♦102
 ♣A108762

West ♠KQ953 ♥A876 ♦J76 ♣J	East ♥10
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The declarer inserted the ♥9 from the dummy and your partner wins the ♥10. He returns a heart which you win with the ♥A. The declarer wins the next trick, knocks out the ♣K which is held by your partner and takes the next nine tricks.

This hand was featured in a bridge book from the 1970's, written by Roxi Marcus. Marcus was illustrating a bridge tip that was novel to me. He advised, "Against Notrumps, don't lead your fourth highest if you want partner to switch to another suit."

Let's look at that opening lead again. Hearts was the best suit to lead. But you need partner to lead a spade through the declarer's honors to make the most of that suit. By leading low, you are inviting partner to return a heart. A low card says you like the suit and want to develop it.

Conversely, the lead of the ♥8 looks like a “top of nothing” lead, saying you don’t want to develop hearts and would just as well like to see partner switch to a suit with more potential.

This is the complete board:

D 1		N North ♠ A ♥ KJ95 ♦ 102 ♣ A108762	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>W</th> <th>N</th> <th>E</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1♣</td> <td>P</td> <td>1♠</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2♣</td> <td>P</td> <td>3♣</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♥</td> <td>P</td> <td>3NT</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	W	N	E	S	1♣	P	1♠		2♣	P	3♣		3♥	P	3NT		P	P	P	
W	N	E	S																				
1♣	P	1♠																					
2♣	P	3♣																					
3♥	P	3NT																					
P	P	P																					
W West			E East ♠ 742 ♥ Q102 ♦ Q943 ♣ K54																				
		S South ♠ J1086 ♥ 43 ♦ AK85 ♣ Q93																					
			3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0																				

Partner won the first trick with the ♥10 and switched to a low spade, knocking out the ♠A. When he got the lead again with the ♣K, he led another spade to defeat the contract: 2 spades, 2 hearts and 1 club.

If you would like to see the whole hand played out, click on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/l3l8w52>
 Or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the “Next” button on the bottom to advance through each trick.