

## Silodar Open Pairs - St. Louis NABC - March 9, 2007

Playing against national champions Garner-Weinstein you hold:

♠J96 ♥6 ♦A96532 ♣K74.

LHO opens 1♠, RHO responds 2♣. Nobody vulnerable, should you overcall 2♦ or 3♦?

At this point you anticipate that the opponent's could easily have a 4-4 heart fit. Their heart fit might not be that good, but partner didn't preempt in hearts so the opponents rate to have length in hearts. If LHO has 5 spades and 3 or 4 hearts, he is unlikely to be able to double you if you enter the bidding. It is more likely that RHO would have a hand that wants to make a penalty double, but it is hard for him to double for penalty when you have diamond length behind him. Since the opponents have both shown strength, it is unlikely that partner will have values to compete too high. So, it should be relatively safe to enter the bidding.

But does that make advantageous to enter the bidding? My general policy is to compete in auctions, so we have some guidance on how to defend. Here a diamond lead could be helpful, especially if the opponent's end up in notrump, where I certainly don't want partner to lead a heart. It is also risky to jump to 3♦, as that is more likely to get penalized for 500 or more points. I judged to bid 2♦.

The auction proceeded 2♠ by LHO, 2NT by RHO, and 3NT by LHO. At no time did the opponents need to take extra time to consider their bids. Apparently both were very content that their bids were obvious and correct.

What do you lead on opening lead?

First you should consider what you think the opponent's hands are. LHO has 6 spades, perhaps 3 hearts, at least 2 diamonds, and about 1 or 2 clubs. RHO probably has only 1 spade, 3 or quite possibly 4 hearts, probably around 3 diamonds, and 4 or 5 clubs. His most likely distributions could be 1444 or 1435 or 1345. I think he is likely to hold 4 hearts.

Now, it is reasonable to assume that the opponents have between 25 and 29HCP. With greater strength they probably would have investigated for slam someplace. Since you have 8HCP, you expect partner to turn up with somewhere near 5-6HCP.

What dangers do you envision in the hand? I see danger in the spade suit - if partner doesn't have high honors in spades, the 3-3 spade break will allow declarer to run 6 spade tricks. I also see dangers in the heart suit. If declarer has 4 hearts, he can probably win 4 heart tricks finessing against partner. It would not be unusual for the opponent's to be able to win 10 fast tricks in the major suits.

So, if you lead a low diamond, you will be helping the opponents win 1 or 2 tricks in diamonds. This defense would not go well at all.

If partner has 5-6HCPs, it is reasonable to guess that around 2 or 3 of them will be in hearts, and the rest will be in either clubs or spades.

That leaves you with only two suits that you should consider as your opening lead: either spades or clubs. On this deal leading either black suit should work fine for the defense. I chose to lead the ♣4, thinking that the 2♣ bid by RHO might be a suspect suit (some good players will sometimes respond 2♣ even with a 3-card suit, leaving the 2♦ bid to guarantee a 5-card suit).

After the club lead the defense was easy. Partner won the ♣A and returned the ♦J. I knew everything was favorable for declarer (probably has 10 major suit tricks), so I cashed my two aces, holding declarer to 10 tricks. This was the entire hand:

	Dummy	Nobody Vulnerable
	♠AKQ874	
	♥K85	
	♦Q7	
Jeff	♣63	Gail
♠J96		♠1052
♥6		♥109743
♦A96532		♦J10
♣K74	South	♣A98
	♠3	
	♥AQJ2	
	♦K84	
	♣QJ1052	

Note that if I had never overcalled, I would have had no reason not to lead a small diamond. At the time I overcalled I wanted partner to avoid leading a heart against 3NT - I did not realize that it would give me a roadmap on how to defend.

You might say that I only saved an extra overtrick, and that is not a big deal. But it was a big deal. On a 25 top we got 23 matchpoints for holding declarer to 430 points as just about everyone made 460 points.