

Board of the Week 41

By Dick Chapman

This week's board was played in a casual BBO pairs game scored at IMPs. Like teams, rubber, or Chicago scoring, IMP pairs places a premium on defense: try to set the contract even at the risk of giving an overtrick.

	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		
♠643 ♥102 ♦KJ6543 ♣K3	V: B D: S	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	
	♠AJ82 ♥J63 ♦Q97 ♣AJ4		
South	West	North	East
1♣	2♦	3♣	3♥
All pass			

This is a rather strange auction but there it is. You are stuck for a lead but elect to go with the unguarded ace of clubs. Partner plays the 9. What is your card at trick 2, and why? You have plenty of time to think, so...think.

The 9 isn't attitude. You are going to switch and partner knows it, so it is suit preference. Spades, not diamonds, as is pretty obvious from the look of dummy.

What spade? Hmm. Do you trust your partner? If not, it may be time for a new partner. Would partner scream for a spade while not holding the ace or king? Probably not. No, that's wrong...there's no "probably" involved. The answer is absolutely not. Partner would give a middle card to say "do what you want." But the 9 isn't middle, it's "spade." So, partner has the king.

You must lead the 2 of spades and not the ace. Partner wins the king and fires back a spade through the gizzard of declarer's queen and into your ace-jack tenace. If all goes well, you score 3 spades and a club. Now you sit back for the setting trick, which either will come or not depending on partner. Good partners will have the ace of diamonds or the Qx (Qxx) of hearts. After the third spade, lead a diamond and sit back for final results.

See the full deal, next column:

	♠K105 ♥Q95 ♦82 ♣Q9752	
♠643 ♥102 ♦KJ6543 ♣K3	V: B D: S	♠Q97 ♥AK874 ♦A10 ♣1086
	♠AJ82 ♥J63 ♦Q97 ♣AJ4	

North came through with a heart winner and the contract fails.

East's 2 diamonds, North's 3 clubs, and East's 3 hearts were all dubious calls, given the colors. The North call did push the opponents to a contract that can be set. As East, would you double 3 clubs when playing for imps? Even with three heart cards, you should not double, as from your perspective the contract rates to make. This is imps, remember, so you want any double of a part score contract to be an almost certainty. There is far too much to lose if you are wrong! In the East seat, I would pass, not bid 3 hearts. In this case, passing could get your sides to a lucky +200 as you score AK diamonds, diamond ruff (or overruff), AK hearts, and K clubs.

And now for a digression from the normal Board of the Week commentary:

The play described above is not a textbook "surround play." It's just normal bridge. You trust partner, you lead low and hope your AJ will score 2 tricks. Do not lead the ace.

But I thought of the surround play when I played the hand (I was South). The surround play comes up more often than you might expect. Here's an example:

	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		♠J1042 ♥1054 ♦A1096 ♣85
	♠86 ♥AJ96 ♦J52 ♣Q1063	

Several tricks into the play at 3NT, South gets in with the club queen and must start the heart suit. What heart is best to beat the contract? It is the jack and not the 6. The goal is to find the queen in the closed hand

and the king in partner's hand. After jack-queen-ace-four, partner leads a heart through the 10 into your ace-nine tenace and you pick up four heart tricks, the full hand being:

	♠Q9753 ♥K32 ♦Q743 ♣9	
♠AK ♥Q87 ♦K8 ♣AKJ742		♠J1042 ♥1054 ♦A1096 ♣85
	♠86 ♥AJ96 ♦J52 ♣Q1063	

Your ace-nine has "surrounded" the 10 in dummy. Any lead other than the jack will allow the contract to succeed.

One writer suggests you imagine you hold dummy's high card plus a higher one and a lower one. In the above hand, imagine holding AJ1096 instead of the actual AJ96. You lead the top of this imaginary sequence (the jack).

A variation, where your higher card is higher than dummy's second high card:

	♠K63	
♠J54		♠A92
	♠Q1087	

Here, as South, imagine holding Q10987 and lead the 10. This forces the jack, king and ace. Now partner can lead the suit back into your Q87 and you win three tricks rather than the normal one or two.

Here's one more example, with the board turned. You are East and South is declaring:

	♠1073	
♠??		♠AJ92
	♠???	

Partner (West) signals "spade" or you otherwise figure out you need that suit to beat the contract. The card to lead is the jack. This picks up four tricks if the holding is:

	♠1073	
♠K65		♠AJ92
	♠Q84	

If you lead the low card you establish Declarer's queen as a trick. Same if you lead ace then low, assuming declarer can read the cards well.

Let's move from the textbook to a real game. In the Saturday Swiss at the recent LRDBC Sectional, I found myself on lead. The board is rotated so I am South:

	Kxx	
Qx		10xxx
	AJ9x	

It's slightly different in that dummy has 10xxx instead of the textbook 10xx. I led the jack and not the small card from AJ9x, winning four tricks. If I lead low, declarer's Qx opposite 10xxx will be a stopper and we will win only three tricks. In this particular layout I could have led the ace then small to score my J9 later. However, I don't have x-ray vision (see note below).

In general, when you see 10xx in dummy and hold AJ9x or even AJ8x, you have good chances by starting a surround play by leading the jack.

I hope this little mini-lesson has been worthwhile. Thanks for reading my periodic musings about our great game. See you at the table.

N.B. Clark Kent would have been a top bridge player but, to his credit, he was too ethical to use his super powers.