

August 1, 2026

Bridge with Richard Ward

The Lightner Double is a bidding convention used to direct the opening lead against slam contracts. It was devised by American, Theodore Lightner, in 1929. The double asks for an "unusual" opening lead which is often crucial to the play of the hand where the winning opening lead is often the only chance for the defenders to defeat the contract. The doubler will most often have a void in a side suit, or sometimes ace-queen or king-queen in the suit bid by the dummy. Partner is expected to find the correct, probably unusual, lead. The most common interpretation is to lead the first suit (other than trumps) bid by the opponents.

NORTH		S / ALL VUL	
♠	J 8 6		
♥	A Q 10 7		
♦	-		
♣	A J 9 8 6 5		
WEST		EAST	
♠	10 9 5	♠	A K Q 7 3 2
♥	9 5	♥	6 3
♦	K Q J 6	♦	10 7 5 4 3
♣	K 4 3 2	♣	-
SOUTH			
♠	4		
♥	K J 8 4 2		
♦	A 9 8 2		
♣	Q 10 7		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
PASS	1C	1S	PASS
2S	4D	4S	6H
PASS	PASS	DBL	ALL PASS

Here is a Lightner Double at work in the English Premier League, sadly misinterpreted by this West who should have known to lead a club. At the table, West decided to lead the ten of spades. Somewhat carelessly, declarer played a low card from dummy to which East was able to contribute the seven of spades, fortuitously leaving West on lead! Finally came the club switch club which East ruffed and that was one down.

Why give up the penalty double in favour of this rather more speculative double? Simple arithmetic. If you double and defeat the contract by one trick because the opponents overstretched, you will increase your score by either 50 or 100 points. But, if you defeat the contract because your partner was able to find the killing lead, you will increase your score by over 1000 points. Of course, if it is obvious that the opponents are sacrificing, then the meaning of double remains as simply penalty because then you are expecting a two, three, or four-trick set.

BRISBANE BRIDGE CENTRE TEAMS [Director – Chris Snook]: 1 Ben Leung / Paul Gosney / Paddy Taylor / Andy Hung; 2 Abby Wanigaratne / Carmel Martin / Alison Dawson / John Kelly; **B** 1 Kathleen Clifford / Oliver Goodman / Sameer Pandya / John Rivers; 2 Monica Gordon / Nanette Hinsch / Rod Wilson / Peter Burke.