

Wake-Up Call

by [Brian Gunnell](#)

On defense, when leading a suit, we follow certain conventions such as "top of a sequence" or "fourth best", all the better to help partner figure out our holding in the suit. But, once in a while, we lie. Consider this deal:

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

	N		♠ J 8 7
	W	E	♥ 6 5
	S		♦ K 9 7 3
			♣ K Q 6 2

♠ 6 4 3
♥ A 4 3
♦ 10 8 6 4 2
♣ A 7

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1 ♠	3 ♥	3 ♠	4 ♥
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

We are South. Against 4♠ our partner leads the ♥2 and we win the trick with the ♥A. Have you figured out partner's holding in the heart suit? Of course not, it's impossible. The lead makes no sense whatsoever. Partner's two is clearly non-standard; it cannot be fourth-best when he is known from the bidding to have at least a six-card suit. What's he up to? He's issuing a wake-up call, requesting us to think outside the box. He doesn't want us routinely to continue hearts; he has something else in mind. What could that be? No doubt he can ruff a minor suit. But which one? Surely not clubs, which would give declarer seven of them. Partner must be void in diamonds.

	N		♠ 5 2
	W	E	♥ K Q J 10 9 7 2
	S		♦ --
			♣ 9 8 5 4

♠ A K Q 10 9		♠ J 8 7
♥ 8		♥ 6 5
♦ A Q J 5		♦ K 9 7 3
♣ J 10 3		♣ K Q 6 2

♠ 6 4 3
♥ A 4 3
♦ 10 8 6 4 2
♣ A 7

North's "alarm clock lead", as it is known, alerts us to the winning defense. A diamond is ruffed at trick two, then a club returned to our ♣A, after which a second ruff. Down one. Those alarm clock leads won't come up very often but they are great fun when they do!