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"Lightner 'Lead-Directing', 'Penalty' DOUBLES of Slam/3NT Contracts"

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The "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" was invented by Theodore "Teddy" Lightner (1893-1981)² in 1929 **originally** for the purpose of (1) suggesting to Partner what lead will set a *slam* contract and (2) to DOUBLE "for Penalty" to obtain a higher, "positive" Bridge Score. Because the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" is both "lead directing" and "for Penalty", the "**Lightner DOUBLE**" is not one of the "not-for-Penalty DOUBLES" covered in the "Esther Bridge Lesson", "7 '**Not-for-Penalty**' DOUBLES".³

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

² Lightner graduated from Yale University and later from Harvard Law School. He owned a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. Lightner partnered with Ely Culbertson, among others. Culbertson was a prolific bridge author and in 1929 the founder of The Bridge World, the oldest continuously-published bridge magazine in the world and is still published today. Lightner played with Culbertson in some of the bridge rubbers in the "**Bridge Match of the Century**": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridge_Battle_of_the_Century#

This "challenge" Pairs match involved 2 teams of Pairs players who played 2 different bridge systems. Each evening 1 Pair from each team of players competed. The various Pairs on the 2 teams played 150 bridge rubbers between December, 1931 and January, 1932. NBC Radio nightly aired a 15-minute broadcast on the match.

³ See "Esther Bridge Convention Lesson #14":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf>

The "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" is used in situations where *without* "lead direction" Partner would not know what to lead to set the contract. S.J. "Skid" Simon in his highly regarded 1945 book, Why You Lose at Bridge, opined that the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" is "one of the most brilliant contributions to Contract Bridge yet made" (p.15)!

In addition to implicating what Suit Partner should lead, the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" also tells Partner what Suit not to lead, and says, "Partner, please do not lead any Suit that our Partnership has bid!" With respect to what Suit lead is *requested*, the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" says:

1. "Partner, lead the Dummy's 'side Suit' if the Opponent who will be Dummy bid a Suit other than the Suit in which the contract has been set."

Example⁴

YOU	LHO	Partner	RHO	YOU
S 6 5 4 2	1H	PASS	2C*	PASS
H 7 4 3	3H	PASS	6H	DBL
D --	PASS	PASS	PASS	
C A J 9 8 7 5				

*Your Opponents are playing the "**2 Over 1 Bridge Convention**" in which your RHO's bid shows (1) **13+** HCPs and (2) **3-4** or more Clubs and does not deny Heart support.

Your "**Lightner DOUBLE**" requests a Club lead, which Partner would not ordinarily lead because your RHO bid Clubs.

⁴ These examples are drawn (with some modifications in the cards) from the posting, "Lightner Double", on Jeff Tang's excellent "**Bridge Bum**" website:
www.bridgebum.com/lightner_double.php

2. "Partner, lead an 'unusual' Suit you would not ordinarily bid."

<u>Example</u>				
YOU	LHO	Partner	RHO	YOU
S 8 5 3	1 S	3 C	3 S	5 C
H --	6 S	PASS	PASS	DBL
D A T 9 7 6	PASS	PASS	PASS	
C K 9 8 5 3				

Your "**Lightner DOUBLE**" asks Partner to not lead a Club, your "side Suit" bid by both you and Partner, which would be ordinary practice absent the "**Lightner DOUBLE**", and instead find an "unusual" lead, in this case a Heart or a Diamond. Partner presumably is "long" in Hearts and will anticipate that you can ruff Hearts.

3. "Partner, lead any 'unusual' Suit that you otherwise would not have led because I have a void and I want to take an early ruff against Opponent's Suit contract."

<u>Example</u>				
YOU	LHO	Partner	RHO	YOU
S A 8 7 3	1 D	PASS	3 D	PASS
H --	4 NT	PASS	5 D	PASS
D 8 5	6 D	PASS	PASS	DBL
C T 9 7 6 5 4 2	PASS	PASS	PASS	

Your "**Lightner DOUBLE**" asks Partner to find an "unusual" lead, usually in a Major when Partner "on lead" has no other information to guide his lead, and in this case either a Spade or a Heart.

Other Considerations

First, the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" is not Alertable! As Larry Cohen noted in his website 2021 posting, "Lightner Doubles":⁵

"Theodore Lightner invented the idea of doubling a slam to ask for an unusual lead... The doubler expects that without alerting his partner to the need for a special lead, the slam [or game contract] will make. Lightner doubles are not

⁵ See: <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/lightner-doubles>

alertable" because they are always "for Penalty" but also "lead-directing".

Second, consider Vulnerability when determining whether to make a "**Lightner DOUBLE**". Especially when your Opponents are Vulnerable, when you make a "**Lightner DOUBLE**" you need to be certain that your Partnership will "set" the Opponents' contract.

Third, the "**Lightner DOUBLE**" is "off" when Opponents bid slam but that bid is clearly a "sacrifice" contract.

Fourth, it is also *extremely important* to pay attention when your Partner could have made a "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**", but did not do so. As Jeff Tang noted, "[I]f the [O]pponents bid a side [S]uit en route to a slam contract and [P]artner does not double, the inference is that [P]artner does NOT want a lead of the enemy side [S]uit."

"Lightner DOUBLES" of Opponents' 3NT Contract

More recently, the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" is also used by some Partnerships against *Game* contracts, and especially 3NT contracts. Barbara Seagram provides an example in her posting, "The Lightner Slam Double":⁶

		NORTH (14) ⁷			
		S:	A 6 5 4 3		
		H:	J 6		
		D:	A 3 2		
		C:	K Q 3		
WEST (4)				EAST (10)	
S:	T			S:	K Q J 9 7
H:	9 8 7			H:	A 5 3
D:	Q J T 9 8			D:	7 5
C:	J 9 7 5			C:	T 6 4
		SOUTH (12)			
		S:	8 2		
		H:	K Q T 4 2		
		D:	K 8 4		
		C:	A 4 2		

Bidding

⁶ See: <https://www.barbaraseagram.com/pdf/august21-28-2020-past-articles.pdf>

⁷ Esther has modified some of the cards in this illustrative Board.

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 H	PASS	1 S	PASS
1 NT	PASS	3 NT	DBL
PASS	PASS	PASS	

In this example EAST knows that WEST will be "on lead" against 3**NT**. With this Hand WEST would *normally* lead his Diamond Queen from the "top" of his 5-card Diamonds with the "touching" Honors Q,J,T,9,8. EAST's bid says, "Partner, do not make your 'normal' lead." On this Board in this bidding sequence the "**Lightner Lead-Directing, Penalty DOUBLE**" says, "Partner, WEST, please lead the Suit **bid by my RHO Opponent, NORTH, who will become the Dummy!**"

When WEST leads his Heart 7 EAST will "cash" his Heart Ace on Trick #1. On Trick #2 EAST will lead either his Spade King thus showing "long and touching" Honors, or if E/W are playing "Middle, Up, Down", or **M.U.D.**, his Spade Queen.