



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(252) Opening Leads from AQTx+

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Level: 2

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General

When we make an opening lead against a NT contract with two or fewer honors, we often lead 4th from our longest and strongest suit. When we have three honors (or high cards) in our suit then we tend to lead one of these honors. This is usually the top of touching honors, or sometimes it is the top of an interior sequence. Some examples of holdings where we lead an honor are KQTxx or QT9xx. We lead high cards from these type of holdings to prevent the declarer (or dummy) from winning the opening lead with a small card. When we have three high cards that are non-touching then we have a more challenging opening lead problem. There are two of these holdings for us to consider – KJ9x+ and AQTx+. With KJ9x or KJ9xx we need partner to have an honor for this lead not to cost and we usually just lead 4th best. But leading from AQTx+ is a more complicated situation. Here we look at this problem holding in much more detail.

An Opening Lead from AQTxx

Based on the layout of the suit around the table, the winning card can be a variety of different ones from this awkward holding. The best opening lead will usually be either the Ace, the Queen, or even 4th best. Let's look at some examples of the way the suit may lay around the table and see what the best lead is in each of these situations.

Example 1

```
      K
AQTxx      Jxx
      xxxx
```

Here the winning lead is the Ace, then low to partner's Jack, in order to run the suit.

Example 2

```
      K
AQTxx      xxxx
      Jxx
```

Here we want to lead the Ace, then probably shift to another suit to get partner on lead to lead through the declarer's Jack.



Example 3

x
AQTx Kxx
 J98x

Here the opening lead of the Ace, Queen, or even 4th best will work! We cannot go wrong here, unless we lead the Ten!

Example 4

J
AQTx 9xx
 Kxxx

The best opening lead from this holding is the Queen. This smothers the Jack in the dummy and forces out the declarer's King, making the suit ready to run as soon as either we or partner gain the lead. The opening lead of the Ace here would capture the Jack, but it would leave declarer with the master card (the King) in the suit and allow them to make a holdup play and cut communication between us and partner.

Example 5

x
AQTx Jxx
 Kxxx

Leading the Queen or 4th best is best from this holding. The King will win a trick no matter which card we lead. But if we lead the Ace, again we put declarer in control of the suit and allow them to make a holdup play and cut communication between us and partner.

Example 6

xxx
AQTx Kx
 Jxx

From this holding the lead of the Queen or 4th best will be successful in allowing us to run the first 5 tricks.

Example 7

Jxx
AQTx Kx
 xxx

It can be right to lead 4th best, especially if we have no outside entry. Here is an example of where leading the Ace or the Queen will block the suit.



Example 8

xx
AQTxx xxx
KJx

Here a 4th best lead or a lead of the Queen will force out one of declarer's stoppers and allow our side to run the suit if partner gains the lead.

Example 9

Jx
AQTxx xxx
Kxx

The best lead from this holding is the Queen. This will force out declarer's stopper and allow our suit to be ready to run if either we gain the lead or partner gains the lead. If we lead 4th best, then declarer can win dummy's Jack and we will need partner to gain the lead in order to run the suit. If we lead the Ace, then declarer can later make a holdup play and cut communication. Then we would need to get to lead in order to run the suit, so the Queen is the best in this situation.

Example 10

Kxx
AQTxx xxx
Jx

From this holding the Queen is the best opening lead. A lead of the Ace allows declarer to holdup and cut communication, and the lead of 4th best allows declarer to have two stoppers.

Standard Lead from AQTxx

As you can see from the examples, there are holdings where each card (Ace, Queen, or 4th best) is the winning lead. But the general consensus for the best opening lead from this holding (given no information from the auction) is the Queen.

AQTxx

The lead of the Queen is a nice balance between forcing out a higher honor (not leading too low) and still remaining in control of a suit (keeping the Ace and not letting the declarer make a holdup play to cut communication between us and partner.)

Conclusion

Opening leads can be a challenge on many hands. They are particularly challenging when we have a holding like AQTx or AQTxx. The variety of honors and tenaces makes it a bit of a guess as to which card will be the best opening lead. This is a challenging holding to lead from, but one that you may hold on a regular basis and it is worth the time and effort to make the best opening lead you can from this holding. Think about the layout of the cards and make your best attack!