

LEADS, SIGNALS AND DISCARDS



If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.

Seneca

Any book on defense needs to lay out, right at the start, the basic methods that will be assumed throughout. Are we going to suggest something new and wonderful? No! You will be relieved to hear that we are going to recommend methods that have been tried and tested over the decades.

Opening leads

We will look first at opening leads. In later chapters we will explain how you should choose which suit to lead. Sometimes it is right to attack by trying to score tricks or set them up. Other times it is better to be passive, seeking an opening lead that is unlikely to give a trick away. For the moment, we will consider only the particular card that you should lead from various suit holdings. The choice of card is usually the same, whether you are defending a suit contract or a notrump contract.

Which card should I lead against notrump?

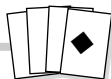
- ◆ From a 'perfect sequence' of three or more honors, lead the top card: the ace from A-K-Q; the king from K-Q-J.
- ◆ From a 'broken sequence' of three or more honors, again lead the top card: the ace from A-K-J; the queen from Q-J-9.
- ◆ From an interior sequence, lead the top of the touching honors: the jack from K-J-10; the ten from Q-10-9.
- ◆ From a holding of four or more cards containing at least one honor (not a sequence of three), lead the fourth-best card: the two from K-8-7-2 and the four from Q-J-6-4-3.
- ◆ From a holding of three cards containing one honor or two non-touching honors, lead the bottom card: the five from Q-8-5; the three from K-J-3.
- ◆ From three cards containing touching honors, lead the top honor: the king from K-Q-4; the jack from J-10-5.
- ◆ Lead the top card from a doubleton.

What should I lead from three or four small cards?

Suppose you decide to make a lead from ♥8-5-2. Which card should you lead? We recommend 'top of nothing' from three small cards. When partner sees your ♥8, he will know that you are leading from weakness. Many players in Europe lead the second-best card from a weak suit and would lead the ♥5; however, it then becomes difficult to distinguish between ♥K-8-5 and ♥8-5-2. Some players in North America lead the ♥2 from ♥8-5-2, but this makes it impossible to tell if they are leading from strength or weakness. You won't go far wrong by leading 'top of nothing'.

BY THE WAY

Even if you normally lead 'top of nothing' from three spot cards, it is common practice to lead the lowest card instead when partner has bid the suit and you have not raised. The reasoning behind this is that it is now more important for partner to know how many cards you hold.



The situation is slightly different when you hold four cards. Now the lead of your top card may cost a trick. Suppose you are West here:

♠ 9 7 6 2	♠ Q 5 3 □ ♠ A K 8 4	♠ J 10
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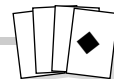
If you lead a top-of-nothing ♠9, declarer will make four tricks in the suit, scoring the ♠8 on the fourth round. It is better to lead the second-best card from four small,

preserving your top card. Lead the ♠7 and you will restrict declarer to three tricks in the suit.

You get the idea, then. You lead a low spot card to suggest that you have something good in the suit and would welcome it being continued. A high spot card suggests that you are leading from a weak suit and it may be a good idea for partner to look elsewhere for tricks when he gains the lead.

BY THE WAY

A useful memory aid for this principle is BOSTON: Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing.



Do I lead the same card against a suit contract?

Most of the time you choose the same card from a given combination, whether you are leading against a suit contract or a contract in notrump. There are two exceptions to this rule. Suppose you hold ♠A-10-8-6-3. The ♠6 is a promising lead against a notrump contract, because you hope to set up the suit and score several spade tricks later, whereas the ♠6 would be a very poor lead against a suit contract. If declarer had a singleton spade, in his own hand or the dummy, you might never make a trick with your ace! Almost certainly, you would do better to lead a different suit. If you are determined to lead a spade, you must lead the ace.

Do not underlead an ace against a suit contract

Suppose next that you hold ♥K-Q-8-5-2. The ♥5 would make an admirable lead against a notrump contract because you hope to set up the suit and score several heart tricks later. However, there is little possibility of doing this against a suit contract because someone will be able to ruff the third round. If you choose to lead from this combination against a suit contract, you must lead the ♥K. Even if declarer wins with the ♥A, which you rather expect, you can score the ♥Q on the second round.

Lead the higher of touching honors against a suit contract

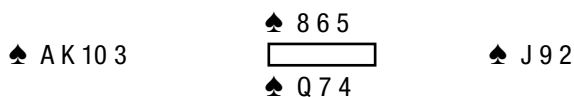
How do I tell partner that I like his lead?

When partner leads a low card, you will often have to play 'third hand high' in an attempt to win the trick or force declarer to win with a higher card, thereby promoting a trick for the defense. When instead partner leads an honor, you may have a choice of spot cards to play and a chance to 'signal'. What does this mean? You choose one of your spot cards to pass a message to your partner. The most popular scheme of signaling is to play a high card to indicate that you like the suit and would welcome a continuation; a low card discourages a continuation. This is known as giving an 'attitude signal'. Here is a straightforward example:

♠ A K 10 3	♠ 8 6 5 □ ♠ J 7 4	♠ Q 9 2
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West, your partner, leads the ♠A against a contract of four hearts. You expect him to hold the ♠K as well (because it is usually a bad idea to lead an ace when you do not also hold the king). Since you hold the ♠Q, you want to encourage the opening lead. You follow with the ♠9 on the first round. Noting your encouraging signal, West continues with the ♠K and then a low spade, allowing you to score three tricks in the suit.

Now suppose that the spade layout had been different:



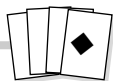
Again your partner leads the ♠A against a heart contract. This time you do not want partner to continue the suit, because you fear that it will set up South's ♠Q. You therefore follow with your lowest spot card, the ♠2, giving a discouraging signal. West will switch to a different suit and you will avoid giving declarer an undeserved spade trick. (If West held ♠A-K-Q he would continue the suit anyway, of course. Your signal simply shows him what you hold. It is not a command to do one thing or another.)

Is it different when declarer leads a suit?

The situation changes when declarer leads a suit. This will usually be a suit where he holds most of the strength — a suit that he is trying to establish. There is no point in telling partner whether you want the suit to be continued or not. (Declarer is playing the suit, anyway!) Instead you should use your signal for a different purpose, to let your partner know how many cards you hold in the suit. This is known as ‘giving a count signal’. A high spot card shows an even number of cards in the suit. A low spot card shows an odd number of cards.

BY THE WAY

In the early days of bridge, it was standard practice to lead the king at Trick 1 from AKx as well as from KQx. You can see how this method could lead to problems and it has largely been abandoned. (Partner with J-9-2 would not know whether or not to encourage.) In the middle of the deal, however, it is important to lead the king from AKx if you want to play such a suit. This allows you the luxury of being able to switch to leading an unsupported ace, which you will want to do from time to time, without also promising the king.



Why should partner be interested in how many cards you hold in a suit? Because he can then work out many cards declarer has. It will also help him to build a ‘complete count of the hand’ — in other words to determine the shape of each player’s hand. The more you play bridge, the more you will appreciate how important it is to count the shape of the hands.

A direct benefit of count signals may arise when one of the defenders has the chance to disrupt declarer’s communications by holding up an ace. Suppose declarer leads the ♦8 from his hand here:



Sitting West, you follow with the ♦2. This is a count signal, a low spot card showing that you have an odd number of cards in the suit. From East's point of view it is likely that you hold three diamonds, leaving declarer with two. He will therefore refuse to take the ♦A until the second round, aiming to cut declarer's communications to the remaining diamond winners. (If the ♦2 happens to be a singleton, with declarer holding four diamonds, it will not matter when East takes his ♦A.)

What is a 'high' spot card?

Sometimes you hear players say, "We treat the seven or above as a high card; six or below is treated as a low card." There is not much sense in that! You can only signal with the cards that you hold in your hand.

Suppose partner has led the ♠A and you want to signal encouragement from your ♠Q-3-2. The best you can do is follow with the ♠3. A watchful partner will note that the ♠2 is 'missing'. He may therefore conclude that you intend your ♠3 as an encouraging card.

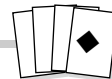
Now imagine that partner has led the ♠A and you want to discourage from ♠J-9-7. The best you can do is signal with the ♠7. Partner should take a close look at all the spot cards in his own hand and the dummy, as well as the card that declarer has played. He will often be able to deduce that your ♠7 is a discouraging card.

Discards

When declarer (or your partner) leads a suit in which you hold no more cards, you have the opportunity to pass a message to your partner with your choice of discard. The most popular and traditional scheme is that a high card shows interest in the suit that you discard; a low card shows disinterest. So, you might discard the ♣9 from ♣K-Q-9-8-2 to tell partner that you hold strong clubs. From ♥10-8-7-6-3 you would discard the ♥3 to indicate a lack of interest in the suit. We will return to the important topic of discarding in two later chapters.

BY THE WAY

When you signal with your spot cards by playing first a high one and then a lower one, this is called an 'echo'. It is used to signal either encouragement or an even number of cards, depending on who is leading the suit. In the U.K. the same signal is called a 'peter', an old whist term derived from the Blue Peter, a flag that is hoisted when a ship is ready to sail.



Summary

- ✓ Once you have chosen which suit to lead, the choice of card from within that suit is usually a matter of convention (for example, fourth best from a suit containing an honor).
- ✓ Throughout the book, assume the use of the lead conventions that we recommend at the start of this introductory chapter (p. 12).
- ✓ When *partner leads to a trick* and you have the opportunity to signal, play a high card to encourage that suit or a low card to discourage. This is known as an *attitude signal*.
- ✓ When *declarer leads to a trick* and you have the opportunity to signal, play a high card to show an even number of cards in the suit or a low card to show an odd number. This is a *count signal*.
- ✓ When you are discarding, a high card shows that you like that suit; a low card shows that you have no interest there.
- ✓ All signals and discards are intended to show what you hold, rather than to tell partner what to do. Your partner will look at all the evidence available, including the cards in his own hand, before deciding on the best line of defense.

LEADS, SIGNALS AND DISCARDS

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

1. What card would you lead from the following holdings against a contract of 3NT?

- (a) ♠ A 9 6 4 3
- (b) ♥ Q J 10 3 2
- (c) ♥ 8 6 3
- (d) ♣ K Q 6 3
- (e) ♠ J 10 8 5 2
- (f) ♥ Q 10 9 2
- (g) ♦ 9 7 5 2
- (h) ♣ J 7 6

2. What card would you lead from the following holdings against a contract of 4♥?

- (a) ♠ K J 3
- (b) ♦ 10 6
- (c) ♣ K Q 6 3
- (d) ♠ A K 6 2
- (e) ♦ A 9 7 4
- (f) ♣ K 10 9 3

3. Partner leads the ♦A against a suit contract. What card would you play from (a) ♦Q-8-2 (b) ♦10-7-3. Why?

4.



Declarer leads the ♥5 from his hand to partner's ♥2 and dummy's ♥K. Which card do you play and why?

5. You are defending a contract of 4♥ and on the second round of trumps your partner discards the ♦9. What do you think this discard means?

1. Against a notrump contract you would lead these cards:
 - (a) ♠4 The fourth-best card from a suit containing an honor.
 - (b) ♥Q Top of a sequence
 - (c) ♥8 Top-of-nothing from three spot cards (but lead the ♥3 if partner has bid the suit and you have not raised).
 - (d) ♣3 Fourth-best card when only two honors are held
 - (e) ♠J Top of a broken sequence.
 - (f) ♥10 Top of an interior sequence.
 - (g) ♦7 Second-best card from four or more spot cards.
 - (h) ♣6 Low from three cards headed by an honor.
2. Against a suit contract you would lead these cards:
 - (a) ♠3 Bottom of three cards headed by an honor, unless you have two touching honors.
 - (b) ♦10 Top of a doubleton.
 - (c) ♣K Against a suit contract only, lead the top honor from two touching honors.
 - (d) ♠A Ace from ace-king.
 - (e) ♦A Not an attractive lead, but against a suit contract never underlead an ace.
 - (f) ♣10 Top of an interior sequence.
3. An attitude signal tells your partner whether you would like him to continue the suit he has just led. A high card encourages a continuation and a low card discourages. When partner leads the ♦A and you hold ♦Q-8-2, you should signal with the ♦8 to encourage a continuation. If instead you hold ♦10-7-3 you should play the ♦3 to discourage. The purpose behind such a signal is to indicate your holding in the suit, in order to assist partner's defense.
4. Play the ♥3, to indicate an odd number of cards. A count signal tells partner whether you hold an odd or an even number of cards in the suit led. You give such a signal when declarer leads a suit and you do not have to play high in an attempt to win the trick. The purpose of such a signal is to allow your partner to know how many cards you (and consequently the declarer) hold in the suit.
5. A high discard, such as the ♦9, shows that partner has strength in that suit, here diamonds. It will probably be best for you to lead this suit when you gain the lead. A low discard instead, such as the ♣3, would indicate that partner had no special interest in the suit discarded.

CHAPTER



THIRD-HAND PLAY



Strong reasons make strong actions.

William Shakespeare

We know you are looking forward to adding some spectacular defensive coups to your repertoire. We will come to those in due course (that's a promise). Meanwhile, it is our duty to point out that ignorance of such splendors as the Deschappelles Coup will not cost you very much in a lifetime of playing bridge. Many more tricks are squandered on defense by choosing the wrong card to play to a trick. So, in this early chapter we will cast an eye in that direction. We will look at the general rules for playing in the third seat, paying particular attention to situations where it may be right to break the rules.

Very soon after you started playing bridge, someone undoubtedly told you that 'third hand plays high'. Yes, indeed. The reason you play high is to prevent declarer from scoring an undeserved trick with some low card in his hand:

♣ Q 9 6 3	♣ 7 4 2 []	♣ K 10 8 5
	♣ A J	

Partner leads the ♣3 and you play the ♣K (third hand high). This forces declarer's ace and partner will now score a trick with the queen. Suppose you are too

mean to part with the king and play the ♣10 instead. Declarer will be ecstatic: he will win with the ♣J and score two tricks in the suit. So, when partner leads a low card and dummy has small cards in the suit, it is essential to play high in the third seat.

What if dummy has a high card in the suit led?

Life is not so easy in the third seat when dummy holds a high card in the suit that has been led. Suppose you are East here:

♥ Q 9 8 2	♥ J 6 4 □ ♥ A 7 5	♥ K 10 3
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West leads the ♥2 against a contract such as 4♠. Since it would be poor play (against a suit contract) to lead the ♥2 rather than the ♥K from ♥K-Q-8-2, declarer knows that there is no point in playing the jack from dummy. He plays low instead and you must find the best play in the East seat. Which card would you choose?

Following the unqualified guideline ‘third hand high’, some players would play the king. Not the best! Declarer wins with the ace and will subsequently score an undeserved second heart trick with dummy’s jack. You must keep the ♥K to deal with dummy’s ♥J and should therefore play the ♥10 instead. Declarer wins with the ace and the defense will now score two heart tricks with the king and queen. Such a defensive play is known as ‘finessing against the dummy’.

As a general rule:

in third seat, when your top card can beat dummy’s honor, insert your second-highest card when it is the nine or higher and dummy plays low.

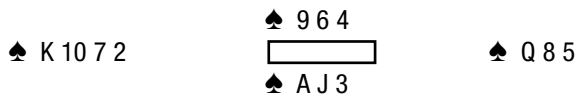
What if you have two cards of equal rank?

Suppose partner leads a low card and, in the third seat, you have two touching honors (such as the queen and jack). Which one should you play?

♠ K 10 7 2	♠ 9 6 4 □ ♠ A 8 3	♠ Q J 5
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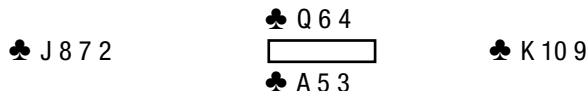
West leads the ♠2, dummy playing low, and the correct play in the East seat is to *play the lower (or lowest) of touching honors*. Here the ♠J will force South’s ♠A. When your partner gains the lead later in the play, he will know that you hold the ♠Q; otherwise declarer would have taken the ♠J with the ♠Q. So West can confidently continue spades.

Suppose the cards lie differently:



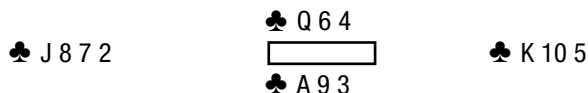
West leads the ♠2 to your ♠Q and South's ♠A. Since you would have played the ♠J from ♠Q-J, West *knows* that South holds the ♠J! This time, therefore, he will not continue the suit when he gains the lead. To do so would set up South's ♠J.

You follow the same method even when the touching cards are not the two highest in your suit:



West leads the ♣2 against a suit contract and dummy plays the ♣4. Since it is a sin to underlead an ace against a suit contract, you know that South holds the ♣A. Your correct card is the ♣9, the lower of touching cards. When this forces the ace, your partner will know that he should play another club at his first opportunity.

Suppose that the cards lie like this instead:

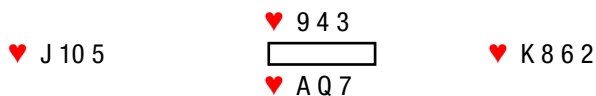


Now you play the ♣10 in the third seat, won with the ♣A, and partner can deduce that South holds the ♣9. It will not therefore be safe for West to play this suit again. (Declarer could run the second lead to his ♣9, forcing your ♣K and setting up dummy's ♣Q.)

When should you break the 'third hand high' rule?

It is a somewhat annoying fact of bridge life that most so-called rules of how to play or defend have exceptions to them. There are several exceptions to the rule of 'third hand high' and the time has come to take a look at them.

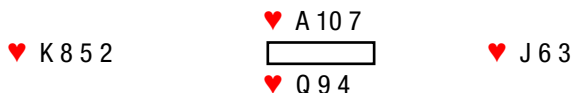
One exception arises when partner leads a jack against a suit contract and you hold the king — this sort of position:



If West had led the ♥J against a notrump contract, it would be possible that he was leading from ♥A-J-10-4. To prevent declarer from scoring an undeserved trick with his ♥Q-x, you might play the king.

Here, however, the ♥J has been led against a suit contract. Since partner would not make such a lead from ♥A-J-10, you can place declarer with both the ace and queen. You should therefore retain the ♥K, contenting yourself with an encouraging ♥8. If instead you waste your king on the first round, your partner will not be able to continue the suit safely when he next gains the lead.

Many players go wrong in the next situation. Imagine you are sitting East here:

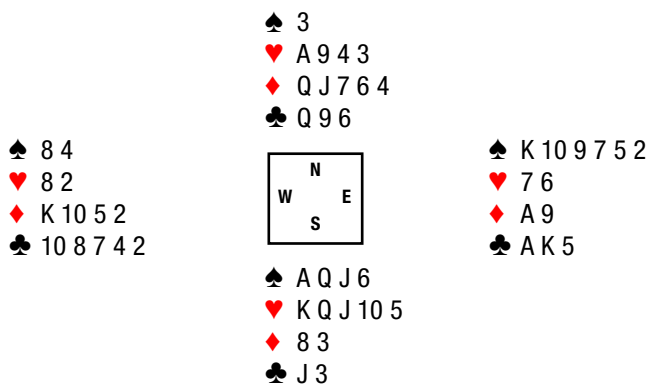


West leads the ♥2 and the ♥7 is played from dummy. Which card should you play?

It cannot possibly be right to play the ♥J! Declarer will win the trick with whatever high card he holds (the king or queen) and subsequently finesse dummy's ♥10. He will score three heart tricks. So play low instead. Declarer wins cheaply with dummy's ♥7, yes, but he will still lose a trick in the suit. (You know that West cannot hold something like ♥K-Q-5-2 because, against a suit contract, he would then have led the king.)

Notice that if you faced the same situation when defending a notrump contract, you might well play the ♥J in the hope that partner did indeed hold ♥K-Q-5-2.

Another common situation where you should break the third-hand-high rule is when you have only one honor and can tell from the lead that partner does not hold any honors himself. Look at this deal:



West	North	East	South
pass	4♥	1♠ all pass	2♥

The defenders have four quick tricks to cash but, naturally enough, West leads the ♠8. How should you defend with the East cards?

Time and again, you will see defenders playing the ♠K, after which the contract will be made. Declarer wins with the ace, draws trumps in two rounds, and throws two of dummy's clubs on the ♠Q-J. Eventually he will be able to ruff a club and a spade in dummy, giving him ten tricks.

It is not at all difficult for East to read the spade situation. Partner's ♠8, a high spot card, clearly denies any honor in the suit. South is therefore marked with the ♠A-Q-J and will score three spade tricks if you play the ♠K on the first trick. Play a low card instead and declarer will make only two spade tricks. He will have no way to avoid four losers in the minor suits and will go down.

Summary

- ✓ When partner leads a spot card and dummy has no honor in the suit, it is usually right to play high in the third seat. Your objective is to prevent declarer from scoring an undeserved trick. Even if your card is beaten, you may have promoted one or more cards in your partner's hand.
- ✓ When partner has led a high spot card, denying an honor, and you hold only one honor in the suit (not the ace), it will often be wrong to play this card.
- ✓ When you are playing from cards of equal value, in the third seat, you should play the lower (or lowest) card. For example, you must play the queen from K-Q-6-3. This will help your partner read the lie of the suit. If you play the king instead, you will be telling partner you do not have the queen.
- ✓ When partner leads a low card and dummy has an honor in the suit, it is often right for you to retain a higher honor and play your second-highest card. For example, if partner leads the ♣4 and dummy has ♣Q-7-3, you should play the 10 from ♣K-10-2 if dummy does not play the queen.

THIRD - H A N D P L A Y

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

1. Partner leads the ♠Q. How will you defend?

♠Q led

NORTH		EAST
♠ 7 6		♠ A 9 5 4 2
♥ A 10 8 6		♥ 4
♦ A Q J 3		♦ 10 8 6 2
♣ 9 8 4		♣ K 7 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
pass	3♥	pass	1♥
all pass			4♥

2. Your partner leads the ♥2 against South's small slam in spades. Declarer plays low from dummy. What is your plan for the defense?

♥2 led

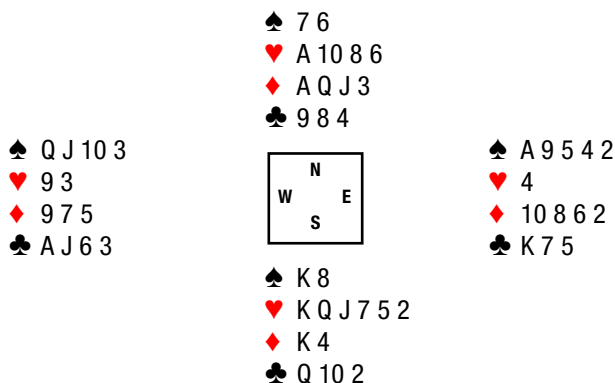
NORTH		EAST
♠ K 10 3 2		♠ 8 5
♥ J 7 3		♥ K 9 5
♦ K Q 6		♦ 9 7 2
♣ A 9 2		♣ Q J 6 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♣	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4NT
pass	5♥ ¹	pass	6♠
all pass			

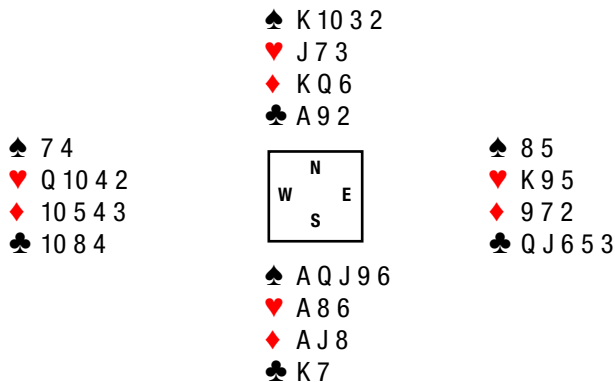
1. Showing two keycards without the trump queen. Playing regular Blackwood, North would respond 5♦, showing one ace.

1.



Your partner leads the ♠Q against South's game in hearts. You should play 'third hand high' and win with the ♠A. If you mistakenly play low instead, declarer might score a trick with a singleton ♠K. When the cards lie as in the diagram, South will follow with the ♠8. You now need three club tricks to beat the contract, so switch to that suit.

2.



Your partner leads the ♥2 against South's small slam in spades. If you play the ♥K, declarer will win with the ♥A, draw trumps and set up the ♥J for his twelfth trick. You must therefore hope that partner has led from the Q-10. Play the ♥9 and you will force South's ♥A, beating the slam.

CHAPTER



OPENING LEADS AGAINST A NOTRUMP CONTRACT



The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of good ideas.

Linus Pauling

Most notrump contracts turn out to be a race between declarer and the defenders. Each side is trying to set up their strongest suit (or suits), hoping to be first to score the tricks that they need. Suppose you are defending 3NT. You need five tricks to beat the contract and, unless you have reason to place partner with a strong suit somewhere, you will normally lead your own longest and strongest suit. As we saw in Chapter 1, you lead the fourth-best card in the suit unless you hold some sort of sequence there.

Suppose the opponents have bid 1NT-3NT and you are lucky enough to hold something like \spadesuit K-Q-J-8-3. This is a splendid suit to lead for two reasons. Firstly, there is every chance of setting up four tricks for the defense. Secondly, a lead of the \spadesuit K is unlikely to give declarer an extra trick in the suit.

Now give yourself a different hand, one that includes \heartsuit K-J-7-5-2. Again this is a fine suit to lead against 3NT. You still have a good chance of setting up several defensive tricks. If partner can produce the ace or queen of the suit, you might not give away a trick in the process. This time, however, you have no honor sequence so you lead the \heartsuit 5, fourth best.

BY THE WAY

The old bridge adage “Lead fourth best from your longest and strongest” is true more often than you would think!



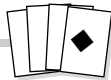
so bright. That said, you may be forced to lead such a suit when nothing better is available.

You get the idea, then. When considering a particular opening lead against a notrump contract, you must weigh up both the prospect of setting up tricks for the defenders and the potential risk of giving declarer an extra trick. When there is a worthwhile chance of establishing several winners for the defense, you are happy to risk giving away a trick. You should be less willing to lead from four cards to an honor when your intermediate cards are poor. In such a situation, you may well prefer to make a ‘passive lead’. In other words you will lead from a suit such as 9-8-6-2 or 10-9-5, where there will be less chance of giving away a trick. Sometimes partner will be strong in the suit that you lead and it will work out well constructively too.

Let’s look at a full hand of thirteen cards. Suppose the bidding has been: 1NT-3NT and you have to find a lead from:

BY THE WAY

You can understand a fair amount about notrump leads simply by comparing the two combinations A-Q-x-x and A-Q-x-x. This five-card holding is regarded as one of the best opening leads available at notrump. There is a big risk of giving away a trick, yes, but also a great prospect of setting up four defensive tricks. However, you sometimes hear this four-card holding described as ‘one of the worst leads in the game’ (a slight exaggeration!). That’s because you are just as likely to give away a trick and will have less compensation in terms of the number of tricks you can create.



♠ J 7 6 2 ♥ 10 9 3 ♦ A 8 6 ♣ Q 7 4

A spade lead is not promising. Leading from a jack is often one of the most expensive leads you can make (more dangerous than leading from a king or a queen). Even if you find your partner with a spade honor — the ace, king or queen — you are more likely than not to give declarer an extra trick in the suit. So lead the ♥10 instead.

Which four-card suit should I lead?

Suppose the opponents have bid 1NT-3NT and you have to find a lead from this hand:

♠ K 7 6 2 ♥ Q 10 8 3 ♦ J 8 4 ♣ 8 5

You would lead the ♥3 because the presence of the ten and eight makes it less likely that the lead will give declarer an extra trick.

Now suppose that you have two four-card suits that are similar in nature:

♠ A 4 ♥ K 10 7 2 ♦ Q 10 6 4 ♣ 9 8 3

It may appear to be a complete guess which red suit to lead. In such a situation you should prefer to lead a major suit rather than a minor suit. Can you see why? It's because responder might have used Stayman if he held four hearts. He is therefore more likely to hold four diamonds than four hearts.

What if the opponents have bid your suits?

Most of the time, it will not be a good idea to lead a suit that has been bid naturally by the opponents. Suppose you have to find a lead here, as West:

♠ K 9 6 3 ♥ Q 10 9 6 ♦ 4 2 ♣ 8 7 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
pass	1♠	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

There is little point in leading either of the major suits after this auction. A club is better than a diamond because you hold three cards there. This means you will be able to continue playing the suit should you gain the lead in the majors. Lead the ♣8 (top of nothing).

What should you lead when you are very weak?

When you have the chance of an entry or two in your hand, it makes good sense to lead from your own strongest suit. When instead you are very weak and expect partner to have the entries, it may be better to try to find partner's long suit. Suppose the opponents bid 1NT-3NT and you must find a lead from this hand:

♠ J 10 3 ♥ 7 6 ♦ 9 8 6 5 2 ♣ 10 8 2

Hoping to set up the diamonds and enjoy the long cards in the suit is a distant prospect. For a start, if partner held four diamonds, the opponents would almost certainly have been playing in a major suit rather than notrump. So, don't look for miracles with a diamond lead; try the ♠J instead. This is better than leading a club for two reasons. First, you have a potentially useful honor holding in spades, which may help to force out declarer's stoppers in the suit. Second, with other things being equal, it is better to lead a major suit than a minor suit. That's because the responder might have employed Stayman if he held a four-card major.

What if partner has bid a suit?

When partner has bid a suit, particularly when he has overcalled, you should normally lead that suit. Suppose you are on lead against 3NT with this hand:

♠ Q 10 8 6 3 ♥ 7 6 ♦ K 6 3 ♣ 9 7 4

If the bidding has been 1NT-3NT, you will naturally lead the ♠6. Suppose instead that your partner has overcalled 1♥ over your left-hand opponent's opening bid of one of a minor. Now you should lead the ♥7. Indeed, partner may have bid his hearts mainly with the intention of suggesting a heart lead to you.

Leading against 6NT

Suppose that you have a suit such as ♠K-J-8-6-2. This represents a fine opening lead against 3NT, of course. You are willing to risk giving away a trick initially, because there is a compensating chance that you might be able to set up the suit and score several tricks from it.

The notion of 'eventually setting up the suit' does not apply against 6NT, when the defenders will gain the lead at most once more (unless the contract is already down anyway). As a general rule, you should *make a passive lead against 6NT*. Indeed, you should base your whole opening lead strategy on trying to avoid giving away a trick. Anyone who leads from a holding such as ♠K-J-8-6-2 against 6NT is telling the world that he is an inexperienced player. Pick a different, safer, suit to lead.

Look at this typical 6NT deal:

	♠ A 10 9 3										
	♥ K J 4										
	♦ A Q 6										
	♣ A J 6										
♠ 8 5	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 7 4 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 9 7 3		♥ 10 8 6 2									
♦ J 9 7 2		♦ 8 3									
♣ Q 9 4 2		♣ 8 7 5									
	♠ K J 6										
	♥ A Q 5										
	♦ K 10 5 4										
	♣ K 10 3										
West	North	East	South								
pass	6NT	all pass	1NT								

What would you lead from the West hand? It is incredibly dangerous to lead a diamond or a club! There is every chance that leading from an honor will give away a trick or save declarer a guess in the suit — in fact that is exactly what

would happen on this deal. Which is safer, do you think, to lead from a ♠8-5 or ♥9-7-3? It is slightly safer to lead from the tripleton. When you have a doubleton, there is a greater chance that your partner holds four cards to the queen or jack. By leading the suit, you might give away the position.

So, on this deal, you should lead the ♥9 (top of nothing). Declarer may still make the contract, or he may not. At least you will not have handed it to him on a plate.

Of course, one particular layout proves nothing at all. Sometimes declarer will hold ♥A-J-x opposite K-10-x and a heart lead will save him a guess in the suit. You just have to play with the odds and choose the lead that looks safest. In the long run it will cost you a bundle to lead from an honor against 6NT contracts.

Summary

- ✓ When choosing a lead against a notrump contract, you must compare two factors, the chance of setting up tricks in the suit and the risk of giving away a trick.
- ✓ Leading from a sequence (such as Q-J-10-5) is good for two reasons. You have an excellent chance of establishing tricks for the defense and there is relatively little risk of giving declarer an extra trick.
- ✓ Leading from a strong four-card suit such as K-J-7-2 or Q-J-8-5 is a fair prospect. When your second-best card is lower, such as K-7-6-2 or Q-8-6-2, this is a much less attractive lead. You may prefer a safer lead from a different suit.
- ✓ It is usually wrong to lead your own strongest suit when it has been bid by the opponents.
- ✓ When your own hand is very weak, it may be a waste of time to lead your longest suit. Even if you can establish it, you will not be able to gain the lead to cash the long cards. In such a situation it might be best to lead a short suit (prefer x-x-x to x-x) in the hope that partner will have a strong holding there.
- ✓ Choose a passive lead against 6NT. It is rarely right to lead away from an honor.

OPENING LEADS AGAINST A NOTRUMP CONTRACT

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

1. What would you lead from each of the West hands shown below?

(a)	♠ K 10 3 2 ♥ 10 8 3 ♦ K 10 6 4 ♣ 9 4	(b)	♠ 10 9 8 5 ♥ 7 ♦ K Q 10 8 3 ♣ A 9 2	(c)	♠ 10 5 ♥ J 10 4 ♦ 10 8 7 2 ♣ 9 7 6 2
	West	North	East	South	
	pass	3NT	all pass	1NT	

2. What would you lead from each of the West hands shown below?

(a)	♠ J 7 3 ♥ 10 8 ♦ K J 6 4 2 ♣ J 10 4	(b)	♠ 8 6 4 ♥ 10 9 8 2 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ 8 5 3	(c)	♠ Q 10 5 3 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ Q 2 ♣ K 10 7 4
	West	North	East	South	
	pass pass	1♥ 3NT	pass all pass	1♦ 1NT	

3. What would you lead from each of the West hands shown below?

(a)	♠ 7 5 4 ♥ Q 7 6 ♦ Q 10 9 7 3 ♣ 6 3	(b)	♠ Q 8 2 ♥ Q 6 ♦ Q 9 8 5 ♣ J 7 3 2	(c)	♠ 9 4 ♥ K J 6 2 ♦ J 8 3 ♣ 9 7 6 2
	West	North	East	South	
	pass	6NT	all pass	1NT	

- 1 (a) ♠2 Prefer a major suit to a minor suit.
- (b) ♦K Lead the top of a broken sequence. You are more likely to score the five tricks you need after a diamond lead than a spade lead.
- (c) ♥J A minor-suit lead, when your hand is so weak, would rarely be productive. A tripleton lead is a better prospect than a doubleton lead, particular when the tripleton contains two honors.
- 2 (a) ♣J It would be a poor idea to lead a diamond because South has bid the suit. The ♣J is more constructive than a low spade because you have two honors in the suit.
- (b) ♣8 You hold only 3 points yourself and must hope that partner holds a fair hand in order to beat the contract. Since he could have overcalled at the one-level if he held five spades, it is more likely that you will find him with a good club suit.
- (c) ♠3 One opponent or the other might have looked for a spade fit if they held four cards in the suit. It is therefore more promising to lead a spade than a club.
- 3 (a) ♠7 To lead from either of your queens would be a serious mistake — very likely indeed to give a trick away. A tripleton lead is more likely to be safe than a doubleton lead.
- (b) ♣2 You don't want to lead away from an honor but you will have to! The least of evils is a low club. That's because you have four cards in the suit and declarer may have correspondingly short holdings, something like ♣A-Q-x opposite ♣K-x-x. A diamond lead might give declarer an undeserved trick with the ♦J. A lead of either major suit would be incredibly risky.
- (c) ♣7 A club lead is safest. (Most players do not lead top-of-nothing from a four-card suit, preferring to lead the ♣7. That's because your ♣9 will sometimes be valuable to guard the fourth round of clubs.)



SECOND-HAND PLAY



We can try to avoid making choices by doing nothing, but even that is a decision.

Gary Collins

You will recall that back in Chapter 2 we discussed basic play in the third seat. The general rule was ‘third hand plays high’ but, as always, there were some exceptions. The time has come to look at the main concepts of defending in the second seat, when declarer has led to a trick from one hand or another. The basic rule in this case, as you doubtless know, is ‘second hand plays low’. In this chapter we will see why it is usually a good idea. In later chapters on maintaining defensive communications and breaking declarer’s communications we will see some exceptions to this general guideline.

Play low to avoid giving declarer an extra trick

When you hold an ace on defense, you hope to capture a high card with it. If instead you gather two lowly spot cards, all declarer’s honors will move up one notch. Imagine that declarer is playing in a major-suit contract and has this side suit:

♣ A 8 6	♣ K 10 7 4 □ ♣ Q 2	♣ J 9 5 3
---------	--------------------------	-----------

What should you do when declarer leads the ♣2? Second hand plays low! If you rise with the ♣A, you will find three very small fish in your net: the ♣4, ♣3 and ♣2. Subsequently, declarer will score tricks with both the queen and king of the suit. Play low on the first round instead and declarer cannot score more than one trick. Whether or not he chooses to finesse the ♣10, you will catch a big fish in your net on the next round: South's ♣Q.

Perhaps you are worried that declarer holds a singleton club and you will never score your ace if you play low. It's possible. Even in that case, rising with the ♣A might not help you very much; declarer will usually be able to throw a loser on the established ♣K. In general, you should rise with the ace only if doing so will ensure beating the contract.

Sometimes it is not easy to tell whether to play low or high. Suppose declarer has this side suit:

♣ K 10 5 3	♣ Q 4 □ ♣ J 7 2	♣ A 9 8 6
------------	-----------------------	-----------

Declarer leads the ♣2 from his hand. Should you play the ♣K or not? Rise with the king here, catching three small cards, and you will give declarer an undeserved trick. On the other hand, the suit might lie like this instead:

♣ K 10 5 3	♣ Q 4 □ ♣ A 7 2	♣ J 9 8 6
------------	-----------------------	-----------

This time it might be better to rise with the ♣K, ensuring that you score a trick in the suit. Well, we never said that defending was easy. Sometimes you have to guess how the cards lie. On many deals you would be able to tell from the bidding, or the play in other suits, whether declarer was likely to hold the ♣A.

Play low to put declarer to a guess

Playing low in the second seat may give declarer a tricky guess. Rise with a high honor instead and you save him that guess. Suppose declarer is playing in a small slam and must lose only one trick from this side suit:

♥ A 10 7 3	♥ K J 5 □ ♥ 8 4	♥ Q 9 6 2
------------	-----------------------	-----------

He leads the ♥4 from his hand, hoping to guess correctly which honor to play from dummy. If you rise with the ace (or even hesitate while you decide whether to play the ace), you will give declarer the slam! Play low instead, giving nothing away, and declarer may well try the jack from dummy.

Here is a full deal on the same theme:

	♠ K Q 7 ♥ A K 5 ♦ Q 10 6 ♣ A J 7 5		
♠ 10 5 2 ♥ 8 7 3 ♦ K 8 4 2 ♣ 10 8 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ J 9 4 3 ♥ 10 9 4 2 ♦ J 9 5 ♣ 9 2	
	♠ A 8 6 ♥ Q J 6 ♦ A 7 3 ♣ K Q 6 3		
West	North	East	South
pass	6NT	all pass	1NT

Sitting West, you make the safe lead of the ♥8 against 6NT. Declarer wins with dummy's ♥A, crosses to his hand with the ♣K and leads the ♦3. How will you defend?

Declarer can see eleven top tricks and therefore needs to score a second diamond trick. This will require a successful guess when the outstanding diamond honors are split. If you rise with the ♦K, you will save declarer this guess; he will score two diamond tricks with the ace and queen, making the contract. If you spend even a moment or two considering the play of the king, you will give away the diamond position and the slam with it.

Whether or not you have had time to take a look at the other suits, you should play a smooth low card when a diamond is led. What you do know is that East *must* hold the ♦J. If declarer's diamonds were headed by the ace-jack, he would have led the suit from dummy, finessing against the king. Play low immediately and there is every chance that declarer will guess wrongly in the suit and go down.

Should you split your honors?

When you have touching honors in the second seat (K-Q-5-2, for example, or Q-J-8), you may have to judge whether to play one of them on the first round. If you do, this is known as ‘splitting your honors.’ Look at this situation:

♦ Q J 5	♦ A 10 4 □	♦ 8 7 3
	♦ K 9 6 2	

Declarer leads the ♦2 from his hand. If you play ‘low in second seat’, contributing the ♦5, declarer will play dummy’s ♦10. To his surprise and delight, he will then score four diamond tricks! You must split your honors (most players prefer to play the higher honor, the queen here). Declarer will win with dummy’s ♦A and you will later score a trick in the suit.

It was easy to make the right play in the previous position, because you could see the A-10-4 sitting over you. Suppose North had been declarer and he had led the ♦2 from dummy (South). Since the king was visible in dummy and you could be pretty sure that declarer held the ace, you would again split your honors. Even if East did happen to hold the ♦A, it would still be right for you to play an honor.

When declarer leads towards his hand and there is no high honor in dummy, it can be a mistake to split your honors. Suppose declarer reaches game in spades and this is his trump suit:

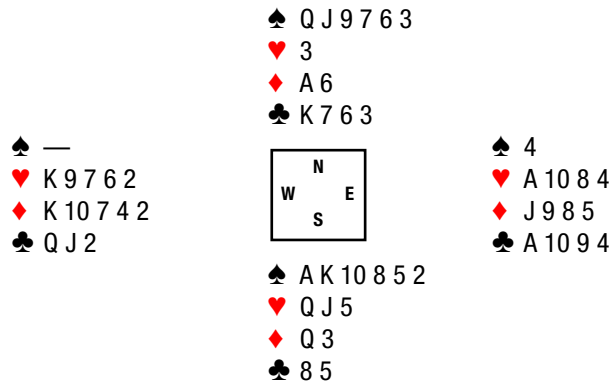
♠ 10	♠ 7 4 2 □	♠ Q J 6
	♠ A K 9 8 5 3	

The ♠2 is led from dummy and you are sitting East. If you play one of your honors, declarer will win and the ♠10 will fall from West. Declarer can then re-enter dummy, finesse against your remaining honor and lose no trick in the suit. Instead you should play low on the first round. Declarer will then lose a trick in the suit.

If declarer holds ♠A-K-10-8-3 and intends to finesse on the first round, there is nothing you can do about it anyway. If instead he holds ♠A-K-10-x-x-x, he probably has no intention of finessing. Don’t make him change his mind by splitting your honors!

What if a singleton is led from dummy?

There is one situation that you will meet time and time again. Playing in a suit contract, declarer leads a side-suit singleton from dummy. You hold the ace in the second seat. Should you play the ace or not? You may be surprised to hear that it is normally best to play low. Look at this deal:



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
pass	4♥	pass	1♠
all pass			4♠

North's 4♥ is a splinter bid, showing a sound raise to game with at most one heart. Your partner, West, leads the ♣Q against 4♠. Realizing that you must hold the ace, declarer plays low in dummy and the queen wins. West's ♣J takes the next trick and he continues with a club to your ten, ruffed by South. Declarer plays a trump to the queen and leads dummy's singleton heart. How should you defend?

If you rise with the ♥A, catching nothing of value in your fishing net, there are two main ways that this might prove expensive. When the cards lie as in the diagram, declarer will be able to take a ruffing finesse on the next round, leading his ♥Q-J through your partner's ♥K. He will then be able to discard dummy's diamond loser on the established winner in hearts.

Another possibility is that South holds ♥K-J-x. If you rise with the ♥A you will save him a guess. Play low smoothly and he is likely to place the ♥A with your partner (that's because most defenders rise with the ace when they hold it), Declarer will finesse the ♥J and not score a trick from the suit. He will lose one trick in each red suit as well as two clubs, going down one.

As a general rule, you should rise with an ace only when you think that this may beat the contract.

Summary

- ✓ As a general rule, you should play low in second seat. This is because you hope to capture an honor with a big card such as an ace or king.
- ✓ Another good reason to play low in the second seat is that you may leave declarer with a guess. Suppose declarer leads towards a K-J holding and you hold the ace in second position. If you rise with the ace, you will save him a guess.
- ✓ Split your honors in second seat when you fear that declarer will otherwise finesse and you will not score either of your high cards.
- ✓ It is often wrong to rise with the ace when declarer leads a side-suit singleton from dummy. If he holds K-J-x-x, you will save him a guess. If instead he holds Q-J-x-x, you will set up a ruffing finesse against partner's king. In general, rise with the ace only when you can see a chance of beating the contract by doing so.

SECOND - H A N D P L A Y

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

1. Your partner leads the ♠10 against South's 6NT. Declarer wins with dummy's ace and surprises you by leading the ♥2. How will you defend?

	NORTH											
	♠ A Q 4											
	♥ A J 7 2											
	♦ A Q 3											
	♣ Q 8 4											
♠10 led	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S			EAST
	N											
W		E										
	S											
			♠ 7 3 2									
			♥ K 10 8 3									
			♦ J 10 8 2									
			♣ 9 7									
West	North	East	South									
pass	6NT	all pass	1NT									

2. You lead the ♦10. Declarer wins with the ♦A and leads the ♠3 towards dummy. Will you split your spade honors or not? What is the reason for your decision?

	NORTH											
	♠ A 9 4											
	♥ K 4											
	♦ K Q 6											
	♣ A Q J 10 3											
WEST	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S			
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♠ J 10 7 2												
♥ 9 2												
♦ 10 9 8 3												
♣ 9 6 2												
West	North	East	South									
	1♣	pass	1♠									
pass	2NT	pass	3♥									
pass	3♠	pass	4NT									
pass	5♥	pass	6♠									
all pass												

1.

<p>♠ 10 9 8 6 ♥ 9 6 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ J 10 6 3</p>	<p>♠ A Q 4 ♥ A J 7 2 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ Q 8 4</p> <table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table> <p>♠ K J 5 ♥ Q 5 4 ♦ K 9 6 ♣ A K 5 2</p>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ 7 3 2 ♥ K 10 8 3 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ 9 7</p>
N					
W E					
S					

Your partner leads the ♠10 against South's 6NT. Declarer wins with dummy's ace and surprises you somewhat by leading the ♥2. How will you defend? Declarer surely holds the ♥Q. If you rise with the ♥K (collecting three embarrassingly small fish in your net) declarer will make three heart tricks. The slam will be his. Play 'second hand low' and declarer will score only two heart tricks, going down one.

2.

<p>♠ J 10 7 2 ♥ 9 2 ♦ 10 9 8 3 ♣ 9 6 2</p>	<p>♠ A 9 4 ♥ K 4 ♦ K Q 6 ♣ A Q J 10 3</p> <table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table> <p>♠ K 8 6 5 3 ♥ A Q J 7 3 ♦ A 7 ♣ 7</p>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ Q ♥ 10 8 6 5 ♦ J 5 4 2 ♣ K 8 5 4</p>
N					
W E					
S					

You lead the ♦10 against 6♠. Declarer wins with the ♦A and leads the ♠3 towards dummy. You should not split your spade honors. Whatever trump holding declarer has, there is no reason whatsoever to expect him to finesse the ♠9 if you play the ♠2. Play 'second hand low' and you score two trump tricks. Split your honors and declarer will make the slam.

CHAPTER



OPENING LEADS AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT



Take calculated risks. That is quite different from being rash.

George S. Patton

The fate of many a contract hangs on the opening lead. Is it easy to choose the best opening lead against a suit contract? No! That's because there are so many types of opening lead that can prove successful. A short-suit lead may allow you to score a ruff. An attacking lead from an honor in a side suit may let you score (or establish) some winners before declarer has a chance to discard his losers. A trump lead may prevent declarer from taking some ruffs. Finally, a passive lead — from a suit such as 8-7-3 — may beat the contract merely because it does not give a trick away. How can you possibly choose the winning lead consistently when there are so many options?

Choosing the opening lead is always a gamble, to some extent, but you can bend the odds in your favor by choosing leads that have a better chance of succeeding than any of the alternatives.

In the opening chapter of this book we noted which card you should lead from various holdings in a suit. That much is easy to learn. Deciding which of the four suits to lead is sometimes a difficult decision. In this chapter we will look in turn at the various types of lead against a suit contract. Which are good bets, worthy of our patronage, and which are poor risks?

When should you lead a short suit?

A singleton is often a good opening lead, particularly against a high-level contract. You will score a ruff when partner holds the ace of the suit led; you may also score a ruff when partner has a quick entry in trumps.

There are a few circumstances in which a singleton lead becomes less attractive. The most important one is when the opponents have bid that suit. You are less likely to find partner with the ace in this case. Also, you may be leading through partner's honor (or honors) in the suit, making it easier for declarer to assemble his tricks.

It is not very attractive to lead a singleton honor either. Suppose declarer is in 4♠ and you hold a singleton ♦J. Such an opening lead might work well occasionally, but you could also find the suit divided like this:

♦ J	♦ Q 6 5 3	♦ K 9 7 4 2
	□	
	♦ A 10 8	

Your lead of the ♦J is covered by the queen, king and ace. A subsequent finesse of the ♦8 succeeds and declarer scores three tricks from the suit. Left to his own devices, declarer will probably lose at least one diamond trick and possibly two.

A singleton is a particularly potent opening lead against a small slam. However, you are hoping that partner will hold a useful ace (in the suit led or in trumps). This is not at all likely when you hold an ace in your own hand. In such a situation you should look elsewhere for your lead.

How about leading a doubleton? In our opinion, such leads are overrated and generally a poor idea. You are less likely to receive a ruff because declarer may be able to win the first or second round of the suit and draw trumps.

Particularly expensive are leads from a doubleton honor. When you lead from K-x, it is possible that you will find partner with the ace and score a ruff on the third round. Every now and again, yes, but you will give away a lot of tricks in the meantime. Even more expensive and less likely to be productive are leads from Q-x or J-x. Use them only as a last resort, except (of course) when partner has bid the suit.

A short-suit lead has more chance of succeeding when you hold a trump entry such as the ace or king. Even if partner cannot win and give you a ruff immediately, you may well have a second chance when you win with your trump honor. However, you should usually not lead a short suit if your potential ruff would be with a natural trump trick, from a trump holding like Q-J-10 for example.

When should you make an attacking lead?

In the long run, one of the best leads to make is to attack from strength in an unbid side suit. Suppose you have to find a lead from these West cards:

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

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

You can picture the dummy with a fair side suit in clubs. Declarer may well establish this suit to obtain some discards. You must attack in one of the red suits to score (or establish) some winners there before declarer can discard his losers. Which red suit should you lead? A heart is much more promising than a diamond. Why is that? Because if you find your partner with the ♥A or the ♥Q, you will be well on your way to scoring some tricks. If you lead a diamond and find partner with the ♦A or ♦Q, the most likely effect is that you will have given away a trick!

This is the sort of layout that you are hoping for:

	♠ K 5 2	
	♥ 10 5 3	
	♦ K 7	
	♣ A Q J 9 4	
♠ Q 9 3		♠ J
♥ K J 8 2		♥ Q 7 6
♦ J 9 4		♦ Q 8 6 5 3 2
♣ 10 8 5		♣ K 7 2
	♠ A 10 8 7 6 4	
	♥ A 9 4	
	♦ A 10	
	♣ 6 3	

You lead the ♥2 against South's spade game and partner produces the ♥Q. Your attacking lead has set up two heart tricks and declarer has no chance to make the contract. After any other opening lead, declarer would have established dummy's club suit and made an overtrick.

"They've chosen a deal where the heart lead happens to work," you may be saying to yourself. It's true but, believe us, with this hand a heart lead is more likely to succeed than any other. You need to score four tricks from somewhere! Unless you set about this objective as quickly as possible, declarer will soon score ten tricks, at least, from his own suits.

What sort of holding should you look for when you decide to make an attacking lead in an unbid side suit? We have already seen that K-J-x-x is promising because either the ace or queen opposite will give you good prospects, but K-10-x-x is fairly good too, with K-9-x-x slightly less attractive. Similarly Q-J-x-x and Q-10-x-x represent better bets than something like Q-8-x-x. In other words, intermediate cards can prove valuable — to assist you in setting up tricks, and also to reduce the risk of giving away a trick.

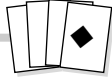
BY THE WAY

An opening lead of the ace from Axxx or Axx is rarely right, but there is an exception:

♠ 873 ♥ A852 ♦ K1063 ♣ 94

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♣
pass	1♠	pass	3♣
pass	3♦	pass	4♣
pass	5♣	all pass	

Here North-South avoided 3NT and went for the eleven-trick game. Clearly they are worried about hearts, and you should lead the ♥A.



You will hear inexperienced players saying, “I never lead away from a king.” Nod politely, if you like, but such players will never go very far in the game. When an attacking lead is called for, you must be brave! Don’t be worried about leading from holdings like K-J-x-x. Indeed, you should look forward to such moments. You want to beat the contract, desperately, and such a lead will give you a great chance of doing so.

When should you lead a trump?

What sort of player tends to say, “When in doubt, lead a trump”? The answer, you will not be surprised to hear, is someone who is usually in doubt as to what to lead! You should lead a trump when the auction positively suggests a trump lead, not because you have no idea what to lead.

Here are some situations where a trump lead may work well:

- The responder has given preference to the opener’s second suit. After an auction such as 1♠-1NT; 2♦-pass, it is quite possible that the responder has one spade and three diamonds. By leading a trump, you may reduce the number of spade ruffs that can be taken.
- Your partner has passed your takeout double, converting it to a penalty double. For example, you double an opening 1♦ bid for takeout and this is passed out. Your partner will have a long, semi-solid trump holding and you should lead a trump to begin the process of drawing declarer’s trumps.
- You and your partner have the great majority of the points and the opponents have sacrificed against some high-level contract. They are obviously relying on ruffing values to score their tricks. You may be able to reduce these by leading a trump.
- On other occasions you may decide to lead a trump because your holdings in the side suits are unattractive. Look at this West hand:

♠ 973 ♥ K762 ♦ J84 ♣ A104

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

You rule out a club lead immediately. Unless you also hold the king, it is a very expensive practice to lead from ace-high suits. Nor is it attractive to lead from a jack — that is very likely to give away a trick. If your hearts were K-J-6-2, you would lead a heart, hoping to establish some tricks there. Here your second-best card is a humble seven-spot, so the lead is uninviting. Reluctantly, you make the passive lead of a low trump.

Leading against a slam in a suit

In the chapter on opening leads against notrump contracts we noted that you should generally choose a passive lead against 6NT. The opposite is the case when opponents reach a slam in a suit contract. Given time, they will usually be able to set up twelve tricks in one way or another. Do not give them that time! Make an attacking lead, aiming to set up a second trick to defeat the slam.

♠ 9 8 6 3 ♥ K 3 ♦ 10 9 3 ♣ K 10 7 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
pass	2♦	pass	3♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♠
pass	6♥	all pass	

What should you lead? You expect to win a trick with the ♥K sitting over the heart bidder. Where can you find a second trick? The best chance is to lead the ♣3. If partner holds the ♣Q, you will set up your ♣K. You may then be able to cash it when you get on lead with the ♥K.

How about leading a spade? It *might* be the winning lead, if dummy held the ♠A and partner had the ♠K sitting over it. All in all, this is less likely than finding partner with the ♣Q.

Summary

- ✓ A singleton is usually a promising lead, particularly if it is a spot card in an unbid suit. Leading a doubleton is less likely to result in a ruff for the defense. Be particularly reluctant to lead a doubleton honor.
- ✓ When you suspect a healthy side suit in the dummy, make an attacking lead in an unbid suit.
- ✓ A sequence such as K-Q-J-x is the most promising attacking lead. Next best is a holding containing two honors (K-Q-x-x or K-J-x-x). A holding such as Q-10-x-x represents a better lead than Q-9-x-x or Q-8-x-x.
- ✓ It is rarely a good idea to lead from A-x-x-x or A-x-x. (An exception is when the opponents appear to have this suit unguarded and have bypassed 3NT to play in five of a minor.) If you do decide to lead from such a suit, lead the ace rather than a low card.
- ✓ In general, lead a trump because the bidding tells you that such a lead may be beneficial. Do not fall back on a trump lead because you are nervous of making an attacking lead, even though the auction has suggested that one may be necessary.
- ✓ Usually make an attacking lead against a small slam in a suit. You must try to set up a second trick for the defense before declarer can establish any discards. (Against 6NT, as we saw in Chapter 3, the opposite is the case. You should generally look for a passive lead.)

OPENING LEADS AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

1. What would you lead from each of the West hands shown below?

(a)	♠ 3 2 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ K 10 8 3 ♣ J 9 4	(b)	♠ 9 7 5 ♥ A 10 7 3 ♦ A J 8 4 ♣ 9 2	(c)	♠ 10 5 ♥ K J 3 ♦ J 8 7 2 ♣ Q 7 6 2
	West	North	East	South	
	pass	2♣	pass	1♠	
	pass	4♠	all pass	2♠	

2. What would you lead from each of the West hands shown below?

(a)	♠ Q J 8 2 ♥ Q 9 3 ♦ 10 7 4 2 ♣ J 3	(b)	♠ J 8 2 ♥ J 6 ♦ J 9 8 5 2 ♣ J 7 3	(c)	♠ Q 8 5 4 ♥ 9 7 6 ♦ K J 7 5 2 ♣ 6
	West	North	East	South	
	pass	3♥	pass	1♥	
	all pass			4♥	

3. What would you lead from each of the West hands shown below?

(a)	♠ 7 5 ♥ 10 7 6 2 ♦ K 10 7 3 ♣ 9 6 3	(b)	♠ 10 2 ♥ Q J 7 ♦ K 9 6 5 2 ♣ J 6 4	(c)	♠ A 6 4 ♥ 5 ♦ 10 9 7 4 2 ♣ J 7 5 3
	West	North	East	South	
	pass	3♣	pass	1♠	
	pass	4NT	pass	3♠	
	pass	6♠	all pass	5♦	

1. (a) **♦3** An attacking lead is required and the presence of the **♦10** makes a diamond lead more attractive than a heart lead.
 - (b) **♠5** You would like to make an attacking lead, but leading from an ace-high suit is rarely a good idea against a trump contract (unless you also hold the king). So, reluctantly, you fall back on a trump lead.
 - (c) **♥3** There is no reason whatsoever to fear making a heart lead. You need four tricks to beat the spade game and some of these will surely have to come from the heart suit.
2. (a) **♠Q** It would be horribly dangerous to lead from **♣J-x**. The spade lead is easily best because you hold two honors and a good intermediate, the **♠8**. Find partner with the **♠A**, **♠K** or **♠10** and the lead may work well. Lead the queen rather than a low card, to make sure declarer doesn't make a cheap trick with the **♠10**.
 - (b) **♦5** Everyone hates leading from a jack. When you are forced to do so, choose your longest suit. You are less likely to give away a trick because someone or other will be ruffing the third round.
 - (c) **♣6** You have a spot card singleton in an unbid suit, so this is an attractive lead. Since you hold three trumps, you will be able to ruff a club even if partner can't get in until the second round of trumps.
3. (a) **♦3** Make an attacking lead against a suit slam. You hope to make one diamond trick (if partner holds the **♦Q**) plus another winner in partner's hand. Once in a while, partner will hold the **♦A**, allowing you to score two diamond tricks.
 - (b) **♥Q** A heart lead is better than a diamond because you hold two honors rather than one. Also, even if a diamond lead would set up a trick in that suit, there is a greater chance that declarer or the dummy will be able to ruff the second round.
 - (c) **♦10** Since you hold an ace and the opponents have used Blackwood, you cannot expect partner to hold an ace. So, a singleton lead (which might give away the location of an honor in partner's hand) is unlikely to be productive. Lead the other unbid suit instead.