

OPENING LEADS

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Opening leads differ depending on whether you are defending a no-trump or a trump contract. Basic techniques are important when it comes to choosing from a short suit or a long suit. Certain mantras also apply. Principles when defending are similar to principles when declaring.

VS TRUMPS

- 1) Partner's suit (highly recommended especially after overcalls)
- 2) Singleton (avoid if you have natural trump tricks or 4+ trumps)
- 3) Top of sequence of 2 cards headed by an honour
- 4) MUD
- 5) 4th highest from long suit (avoid a suit headed by the ace without king)
- 6) Top of a Doubleton
- 7) Trump lead (recommended in certain situations)

1) PARTNER'S SUIT

Leading partner's bid suit is often a highly effective lead regardless of whether you are weak or strong in that suit. If you have an honour then it will help make partner's suit even stronger. Without an honour it is still important to lead partner's suit as you are utilising the important technique of leading from weakness towards strength.

EXAMPLES

K632

Q32

Q2

94

962 (Don't lead MUD in partner's suit)

A73 (avoid leading a suit headed by the ace without the king – lead another suit)

2) SINGLETON

Singleton leads are highly effective for the obvious reason that it makes you void. There are, however, certain times to avoid a singleton lead. Firstly, when you yourself hold natural trump tricks or with 4+ of declarer's trumps. When you hold 4+ trumps your aim should be to make declarer trump in, shortening their trump holding. This may allow you to gain what we call trump control. The reason to avoid leading a singleton in declarer's second bid suit is that it simply helps declarer finesse against your partner.

3) TOP OF AN HONOUR SEQUENCE

When you decide to lead a suit headed by touching honours (or a sequence of honours) you only require 2 honour cards. This also relates to interior sequences, where the sequence does not occur at the top but in the middle.

EXAMPLES

AK32

KQ32

QJ2

Q1093 (example of an interior sequence)

4) M.U.D.

What is MUD and why is it important? MUD stands for **M**iddle **U**p **D**own and is the preferred lead from 3 cards missing an honour. E.g. If you lead a high spot card partner will recognise that you probably don't have an honour in your suit. You would have led a low card with an honour (Low = Like). You follow with your highest card 2nd time (Up) then partner won't be confused with the doubleton signal (High, Low = Doubleton). You finish with your lowest card to complete the signal (Down).

EXAMPLES

962

Q32 (Low = Like and shows an honour)

1062 (The 10 is considered an honour)

5) 4th HIGHEST FROM A LONG SUIT

If you hold a broken honour sequence with at least 4 cards the recommended opening lead is 4th best otherwise known as 4th highest. There are however certain things to consider when leading from such a suit.

- a) Never lead a suit headed by the Ace without the King. Lead another suit
- b) You may lead a 4-card suit headed by the King but should think carefully about leading a 5+ card suit headed by the King.

EXAMPLES

Q9642

K732

AK942 (standard leads from honour sequences)

6) DOUBLETON

Doubletons can work in certain circumstances. They are more effective against part-scores than games and they are best used when leading through dummy's bid suit or an unbid suit.

7) TRUMP LEADS

Don't choose a trump lead because you believe it is safe. The opening lead may be one of the few opportunities for the defence to develop their own tricks so it does not make sense to lead declarer's known suit - you can't develop tricks there!

If you want to lead a trump then you do so for aggressive reasons not passive reasons. Lead a trump if the following scenarios;

- dummy passes declarer's 2nd bid suit. 1♥ (No) 1♠ (No); 2♣ (No) No (No). An auction like this means dummy will be short in declarer's 1st bid suit and declarer will cross-trump the hand. An opening trump lead will shorten the trumps for both declarer and dummy.

- declarer shows a 5-4 shape & dummy's gives false preference 1♥-1♠; 2♣-2♥

VS NO-TRUMPS

1) 4TH BEST FROM LONGEST AND STRONGEST

This is the most popular lead against no-trumps. Whilst it is easy to remember, it may not be the best method. Read on below if you are willing to try something different:

"Opening leads against **trump contracts** vary greatly. We may be leading from shortage and or we may be leading from length. Quite often it is important for partner to know the length of the suit we are leading from in order to work out how many cards declarer holds in that suit or whether partner needs to trump the next round etc.

When we make an opening lead against a **no-trump contract** it is invariably from our longest suit. Partner knows the lead is from length but they don't know whether the suit is strong or not. Wouldn't it be useful to know if partner wants the suit returned? The answer is called attitude leads. Following we will discuss the advantages with showing strength or weakness with our opening leads"

2) ATTITUDE LEADS V NO-TRUMPS

Attitude leads refer to whether the opening leader likes the suit they have led enough to have partner return their lead. A high spot card shows little interest in the suit lead unless partner has good strength as well. A low spot card says partner I like my suit enough for you to return it to me.

Here is a guide for which card to lead from a 4-card suit or longer;

- With 2 or more honours in your suit lead your lowest card
- With 1 honour in suit lead your 2nd or 3rd lowest card (depending on how high your honour is)
- With 0 honours in your suit lead your 3rd lowest card

Non-sequence Attitude leads (card to be lead is highlighted)

AQ1073

KJ74

Q9753

K863

9742

AJ9642

J8642

Sequence leads (2 honours required if AK or KQ, otherwise 3)

AJ1074 (interior sequence), KQ107 (Near sequence - holding the 1st, 2nd & 4th honour)

It is imperative for the partner of the opening leader to study the spot card lead. By looking at the spot cards in your hand and dummy much information can be derived. Just because partner leads a 5 doesn't mean they don't like that suit. If you can see the 3 and 4 in your hand or dummy then this is a suit partner likes.

1. North Dir: N
 ♠ K7 Vul: Nil
 ♥ KJ965
 ♦ KJ543
 ♣ 4

West East
 ♠ Q98 ♠ AJ2
 ♥ AQ74 ♥ 82
 ♦ 976 ♦ Q1082
 ♣ KQ7 ♣ J1095

South
 ♠ 106543
 ♥ 103
 ♦ A
 ♣ A8632

North	East	South	West
1♥	No	1♠	No
2♦	No	2♥	No
No	No		

Bidding: North offers two suits and South returns to North's original suit. This shows a doubleton heart as they would have raised with 3-card support immediately.

Play: With good diamonds it's likely declarer will attempt to get extra tricks via cross-trumping. This is a perfect time to choose to lead a trump. Don't lead trumps just because you don't know what to lead. Lead trumps for a reason

2. North Dir: E
 ♠ 7643 Vul: NS
 ♥ QJ42
 ♦ J72
 ♣ Q7

West East
 ♠ AQJ1095 ♠ K8
 ♥ 7 ♥ K95
 ♦ 53 ♦ AK86
 ♣ A832 ♣ J654

South
 ♠ 2
 ♥ A10863
 ♦ Q1094
 ♣ K109

North	East	South	West
	1♦	1♥	1♠
3♥	No	No	4♠
No	No	No	

Bidding: Despite the vulnerability, North makes a pre-emptive raise to 3♥. When this bid comes around to West, they must be careful not to bid only 3♠ as partner may pass. With such a strong suit, they should choose 4♠.

Play: Have length – lead length. As North has 4+ trumps they should definitely lead their sides longest fit. The aim being to shorten declarer's trumps. This is achieved and declarer fails. Was there a way for declarer to succeed?

3. North Dir: S
 ♠ A65 Vul: EW
 ♥ 942
 ♦ AQJ62
 ♣ K5

West East
 ♠ 2 ♠ 987
 ♥ KJ863 ♥ Q7
 ♦ 974 ♦ K83
 ♣ Q1093 ♣ A8762

South
 ♠ KQJ1043
 ♥ A105
 ♦ 105
 ♣ J4

North	East	South	West
		1♠	No
2♦	No	2♠	No
4♠	No	No	No
<p>Bidding: North shows a delayed game raise typically promising 5+ cards in their first suit. Play: With 3 small cards in dummy's long suit this spells danger for the defence. On that basis West should choose an aggressive lead from their strongest suit - even though it's normally frowned upon to lead away from a KJ holding.</p>			

4. North Dir: N
 ♠ KQ108 Vul: All
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 763
 ♣ AQJ74

West East
 ♠ A9 ♠ 6532
 ♥ 1042 ♥ 9853
 ♦ KQ10854 ♦ 92
 ♣ 83 ♣ K65

South
 ♠ J74
 ♥ AKQJ7
 ♦ AJ
 ♣ 1092

North	East	South	West
1♣	No	1♥	2♦
No	No	3NT	All Pass
<p>Bidding: West is just worth the risk to overcall 2♦. South bids the practical 3NT. Play: West leads the ♦K-3-9-J. With the SA as an entry, it is imperative for West to lead a suit preference card showing where their entry is – ie ♠A. West therefore continues with the ♦Q. High card = high suit return. East wins the ♣K and leads a spade to West's ace. 3 down.</p>			