

Opening Leads (January 25, 2021)

In the last lesson we covered information regarding when to lead trumps.

When dummy takes preference over partner's second suit.

When your partner leaves in your low-level takeout double, converting it to a penalty double.

When your side holds the majority of points and the opponents have sacrificed at a high level.

When a lead from any other suit is dangerous or unattractive.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

West	North	East	South	1NT = 15-17
		1NT	2S	2S = 6+ spades
3NT	4S	Dbl	P	3NT = values for 3NT, denies spade stop
P	P	P		

You are West and hold the following hand:

52
AJ5
Q983
K943

Your side has 25-27 high card points to their 13-15. Where are they going to get their tricks? North figures to have a side-suit singleton or void. A trump lead will cut down on dummy's ruffing power. Then, sit back and wait for your winners!

Equally important is when NOT to lead a trump. If the bidding reveals a “misfit”, it is better not to lead trumps OR the suit bid by the dummy. Let's look at the example below:

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

South	West	North	East
1S	P	1NT	P
2S	P	3D	P
3S	P	P	P

You are West and hold the following hand:

J86
K843
A72
J108

From the bidding, you should rule out leading either a spade or a diamond. The dummy may be VOID in spades; thus, you are doing for declarer that which he is unable to do for himself. Also, how terrible it would be to lay down the ace of diamonds only to have it ruffed at trick one. And, even worse, there sits the KQJxxx of diamonds in the dummy all ready for declarer discards.

Lead the jack of clubs, the top of a near sequence.

Short-Suit Leads (Singleton or Doubleton)

When you have a short suit (singleton/doubleton) **and** have a quick trump entry (Ax, Axx, Kxx, etc.) along with smaller, otherwise useless trumps, you should lead your short suit.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

South	West	North	East
1S	P	2S	P
4S	P	P	P

You are West and hold the following hand:

A65
92
Q743
J1043

Lead the nine (9) of hearts. When spades are led, take your ace and lead your two (2) of hearts in the hopes that your partner will be able to give you a ruff. Short-suit leads are most effective when you hold small trump(s) in addition to the ace (king). You are hoping to score one or more of your smaller trumps.

However, if your trump suit holding looks like the following: KQ10. QJx, or J10xx, beware of leading a short suit in the hopes of obtaining a ruff. By ruffing one of declarer's tricks, you are giving up a **natural** trump—and have gained nothing in return.

In the example above, if your trump holding had been the QJx instead of the Axx, it is better to lead the jack of clubs and not sacrifice your natural trump trick.

It is easy enough to try for a ruff when you are looking at a singleton or doubleton. Sometimes, you are able to determine from the bidding that your partner may have shortness.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

South	West	North	East
1D	P	2D	P
2S	P	3D	P
3S	P	4S	P
P	Dbl (!)	P	P

You are West and hold the following hand:

A
J9xxx
852
A9xx

Why are you doubling the final contract!!

South's bidding indicates 6D and 5S. The dummy surely holds four diamonds for his two diamond raise. You hold three diamonds. **Your partner is VOID in diamonds!**

Lead the two of diamonds (which tells your partner to return a club). As expected, your partner ruffs the diamond and returns a club to your ace. You give him another diamond ruff. When declarer leads trumps, you take your ace and lead your final diamond for partner to ruff. If you had held the ace of hearts instead of the ace of clubs, you should lead the eight of diamonds at trick one.

NOTE: See how paying close attention to the bidding allowed you to accurately determine that your partner had no diamonds.

The lead of a singleton can be extremely productive when your partner has bid. If partner has not bid, then you cannot rely on being able to put him in the lead to give you a ruff. If he has entered the auction, your chances are much improved.

For example: Your partner has bid four hearts and the opponents have reached a contract of four spades.

Your hand: Axx K9xx x xxxxx

This is an ideal hand on which to lead a singleton.

NOTE: You hold a quick trump trick (ace of spades).

You have otherwise useless trumps.

You have a reasonable certainty of getting your partner in the lead to give you a diamond ruff.

The lead of a singleton is extremely unattractive when you hold at least four trumps. You do not wish to obtain a ruff. Rather you should lead your longest suit hoping to force declarer to ruff (recall the Forcing Lead from Lesson I). Eventually, the declarer will have to trump; then your trumps will become equal to or stronger than his.

Other helpful tips:

The lead of a singleton ace and be recommended only in cases where you are certain that your partner can obtain the lead early.

The lead of a singleton king should NEVER be led. Too many singleton kings make on finesses for you to lead it. NOTE: If your partner has bid the suit, then it is more appropriate to lead it.

Practice Exercise

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

West	North	East	South
			1H
1S	3H	P	4H
P	P	P	

You are West and hold the following hand:

AK542
93
A62
K84

What is your opening lead?

Your lead is either the ace or king of spades. Normally, when you lead the ace of a suit, your partner gives an attitude signal—a small card shows no interest in your continuing the suit while a larger card implies that s/he wishes you to continue with the suit. If you lead the king of a suit, your partner is asking you to give count, if possible. A high card implies an even number of cards in the suit; a low card implies an odd number of cards in the suit.

Let's say you led the king of spades. And, the dummy is “tabled”.

	North	
	J7	
	K1086	
	KQJ3	
	763	
West		East
AK542		
93		???
A62		
K84		
	South	
	???	

What is your defensive plan of action once you see the dummy?

You cash the ace of spades, your partner correctly plays the three (implying no interest in a spade continuation).

Now what? Do you choose to defend passively, exiting with a trump or do you defend actively by switching to the four (4) of clubs at trick two?

Let's look now at the complete hand:

	North	
	J7	
	K1086	
	KQJ3	
	763	
West		East
AK542		983
93		54
A62		9754
K84		Q952
	South	
	Q106	
	AQJ72	
	108	
	AJ10	

If you choose to defend passively, exiting with a trump, the declarer will draw trumps and set up the diamonds for discards. Therefore, you must defend **actively** by switching to the four (4) of clubs at trick two. You set the hand because you have established a club winner before the declarer can set up his diamonds for a club discard.

Next week: I want to focus on leading when your partner has bid or has made a lead-directing double.

