

The following hand was played last week by two of our very own.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
		P	1S
P	2D	P	2H
P	2S	P	4S
P	P	P	

You are West and hold the following hand:

Q985
3
1075
KJ965

What is your opening lead? Why?

Let's look at the complete hand below:

<u>North</u>	
J62	
KJ4	
KQJ4	
A84	

<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>
Q985	10
3	Q765
1075	A8632
KJ965	Q102

<u>South</u>
AK743
A10982
9
72

West holds four trumps and wants to FORCE declarer to use his so she can gain control of the hand. She leads the 6 of clubs (her longest suit). Now the Declarer is toast. East/West got 100% on this hand!!!!!!!!!!!!

Opening Leads—Notrump Contracts
(February 8, 2021)

I have two final comments to make regarding leads against suit contracts:

- 1) Many players lead an ace just to take a “look” at the dummy. Laying down an ace rates as a most unattractive lead. Aces were meant to capture kings and queens, not deuces and treys.
- 2) Perhaps the worst of all leads against a suit contract is that of **underleading an ace**. The following situation illustrates what can happen.

	Kxxx	
Axxx		QJxx
	x	

If you underlead your ace, declarer has nothing to lose by playing dummy's king. Later, when you try to “cash” your ace, declarer ruffs! How humiliating.

The following hand illustrates how very important it is to “listen” to the bidding prior to making the opening lead.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1D
P	1H	P	3D
P	3S	P	4D
P	5D	All Pass	

You are West and hold the following hand:

Qxxx
Jxx
10x
AQxx

What is your opening lead? Why?

All players much prefer to play in 3NT rather than five of a minor suit. Note that both opponents shied away from bidding 3NT when they had the opportunity to do so. Why? Lead the ace of clubs. Your partner holds the king!!

Leading Against Notrump Contracts

Today, we are going to focus on leading against **NoTrump** contracts. When leading against a notrump contract, there is more to know than “fourth highest from your longest and strongest”. Sometimes your opponents have bid your best suit. Sometimes you have two suits of relatively equal length and strength. And, sometimes your partner's or your opponent's bidding will tip you off to the best lead.

Some suggested leads include the following:

*Tend to lead any suit partner has overcalled unless you have a strong suit of your own plus an outside entry.

*Strong sequence leads from four card suits (KQJx, KQ10x, QJ10x) are better than weaker broken holdings in five card suits (Jxxxx, Qxxxx).

*Faced with a choice of leading from an unbid major or an unbid minor, with relatively similar holdings in both suits, tend to lead the major. Opponents seldom conceal major suit length during the bidding; but often, conceal minor suit length.

Example: xx
K10764
K10842
x

Here, it is preferable to lead the heart rather than the diamond.

*If dummy uses the Stayman Convention in response to either one or two notrump, he is assumed to have at least one four card major. It is frequently possible to determine which one. For example: Let's say R.H.O. (right hand opponent) opens one notrump and L.H.O. (left hand opponent) bids two clubs (Stayman). R.H.O. responds with two spades. If L.H.O. then signs off in three notrump, s/he must have four hearts; otherwise, why did s/he bother with bidding Stayman? Avoid leading hearts on this auction unless you hold a strong sequence in the suit.

*Sometimes your hand will be so abysmally weak that you will try to hit partner's long suit even though s/he hasn't bid. Keep in mind that if s/he had a chance to overcall at the one level and did not do so your chances of hitting him/her in one of those suits are poor.

Let's look at the following example.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
			1C
P	1H	P	1N
P	2N	P	3N
P	P	P	

You are West and hold the following hand:

853
107432
83
K93

The bidding suggests that the opponents hold 24-25 high card points between the two hands. Because you have only three points, you know that your partner has close to an opening bid; yet, s/he didn't bid. If s/he had held five spades and enough points to bid, s/he would have overcalled the one heart bid with a bid of one spade. In this auction, lead a diamond in the hopes of setting up tricks for your partner.

*If the dummy is known (from the bidding) to hold a long, strong suit, it is imperative to make an attacking lead. If you hold AKx, KQx, or QJx in a suit, it is preferable to lead that suit rather than a weaker, longer suit.

*When you make your lead, it is important for your partner to know whether you have honor strength in the suit in case s/he needs to make a shift.

The lead of a low card in an unbid suit promises an honor. With weaker holdings, such as 8652 (many players are now leading the six from holdings of four or five cards), start with the eight. Sometimes the highest card may be too valuable to lead. For example, from 9732, you might lead the seven. Hopefully, you won't have to lead from such suits very often! Note that if you lead low, your partner may return the suit thinking that you have led from an honor.

The lead of a sequence (QJ109) or near sequence (QJ9x) can be very desirable ones and less likely to give away a trick.

If you do not have a sequence, lead the fourth highest of your longest suit. By using the **Rule of Eleven**, your partner can determine how many cards the declarer holds in the suit which are higher than the card which you led.

RULE OF ELEVEN

When partner leads his fourth-best card from a long suit, you should immediately be able to tell how many cards the declarer holds in his hand which are higher than the card your partner led.

Simply **SUBTRACT** the denomination of the card from the number eleven (11). The result will be the total number of cards higher than the card your partner led which are held among you, the dummy and the declarer.

Suppose South bids one notrump and North raises to three notrump. West leads the seven (7) of spades and this is what you (East) see:

	North	
	K43	
West		East
7		AJ96
	South	
	???	

Declarer plays the three from the dummy. What card should you (East) play?

When you subtract the seven from eleven, you find that you, dummy and declarer together have four spades higher than the seven. Between your hand and the cards in the dummy, you can see all four of them! Therefore, the declarer has no spades higher than the seven!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

If partner has led his fourth best, the spade layout must be as follows:

	North	
	K43	
West		East
Q1087		AJ96
	South	
	52	

You must trust your partner and play the six (6) of spades under partner's seven. This allows him to retain the lead and continue the leading of the spades through the dummy's king. Your side will now win the first four tricks.

Practice Exercise

North
98
J1092
AKJ2
Q65

West
???6(?)

East
Q105
A76
43
J10932

Bidding	
South	North
1N	2C
2D	3N

South
K??

South becomes the declarer at 3NT. West leads the six of spades, dummy plays the nine and East plays the queen, which is won by the declarer with his king. At trick two, the declarer crosses to the dummy with a high diamond and leads the jack of hearts. East (second hand) MUST rise with his ace of hearts and return his ten of spades (the second highest of three). This alert play allows West to run the rest of the spade suit and set the contract.

How does East “know” partner's spades are good? By the Rule of Eleven. When West leads the six of spades, East subtracts it from eleven, giving an answer of five. This means that there are five cards above the six in the three REMAINING hands (excluding your partner's hand). East can “see” two of these cards in the dummy (9 and 8) and two (Q and 10) in his own hand, leaving South with but one card higher than the six.

When South takes the first trick with the king, East knows that West's remaining spades are ready to run. But, how does East know that West has five spades? Because South denied four spades when he rebid “2D” over North's two club Stayman bid.

Again, I cannot over emphasize the importance of paying careful attention to the bidding. It turns out if East ducks the jack of hearts, he allows South to “steal” his ninth trick and make the contract. Try explaining that one to your partner!

Contract: 3NT

Opening Lead: K of diamond

<u>North</u>	
	Q83
	K105
	964
	AQ72
<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>
52	10974
764	J983
AKJ5	832
J1098	K6
<u>South</u>	
	AKJ6
	AQ2
	Q107
	543

How many tricks does declarer have? 8 winners

What card should East play at trick 1? Two. He doesn't want to encourage partner to continue leading diamonds

When partner plays the two of diamonds (discouraging signal), what card should you shift to? Probably Jack of clubs—a sequence.

Does it matter which suit you shift to as long as you don't continue the diamond suit? NO, as long as you don't continue with a diamond.

Card Combinations

You are missing the king in all of these card combinations. How do you play each to make as many tricks as possible?

Hand 1. AQxxx

J32

Lead the two and finesse the queen. There is no other finesse to take. Play the ace in hopes that West held the king doubleton.

Hand 2. AJ10x

 Q92

You can pick up the entire suit even if West holds four to the king. If you have no outside entries in your hand, begin by playing the nine first. When that holds, lead the queen; and, then finally your two.

Hand 3. QJxxx

 A32

There is no finesse. Here, play the ace; then lead toward the QJ in dummy. The most tricks you can win is four. However, if you need two tricks to make your contract and cannot afford to let the defenders in, then you should lead the queen and finesse for the king.

Next Week: I will continue to look at leads against NT contracts. We want to look particularly at guarding against blocking partner's suit.