

Planning the Play of the Hand – Part 1

1. **Initial Considerations:** When the Dummy is first tabled, it is important, at this point, ***not*** to pass judgment on Partner's bidding. To do so distracts from your main goal of successfully playing the hand. Pause to study the cards ***before*** playing to the first trick. Try to consider ***all*** of the possible consequences of the ***entire play*** of the hand ***before*** proceeding.

2. **Step I - Analyze the Opening Lead:**

A. Clues from the Card Which Has Been Led:

(1) The lead of an Ace normally denies possession of the **King**, unless the defending Partnership leads Ace, from Ace-King. (Ask the Partner of the opening leader whether they lead Ace or **King** from an Ace-**King** combination.)

(2) The lead of a **King** normally promises either the Ace, or the **Queen**, or both, along with it.

(3) The lead of a lower honor normally promises the honor immediately below it in rank but denies the honor immediately above it. **Example:** The lead of a **Queen** ordinarily guarantees the **Jack**, but denies possession of the **King**. (**Exception:** The **Queen** might also be led from a doubleton, **Qx**, or from a singleton **Queen**.) The lead of an honor implies at least two touching honors against a suit contract, and three or more if against a No-Trump contract.

(4) The lead of a small "**spot**" card will normally be 4th-best, that is, the fourth highest card held in that suit by the opening leader. Such a lead usually implies an honor below the Ace in the suit (usually a King or a Queen), if it is a trump contract, but not a sequence of honors. (Note: Some Partnerships lead 3rd best, and some 5th best.)

(5) The lead of an intermediate or high "**spot**" card, if it cannot be a 4th-best lead, normally expresses little or no interest in that suit. Most commonly, the lead is either "**top-of-nothing**," 2nd-highest, from a doubleton, or is a singleton.

B. Clues from a Card Which Has Not Been Led:

(1) Failure to lead an honor normally suggests that the opening leader's hand does not contain a sequence of honors in any one suit. Thus, if you are missing a sequence, you may infer either that the honors are divided between your Opponents or that they are held by the Partner of the opening leader.

(2) Failure to lead one's own bid suit normally implies a "**tenace**," an unsupported Ace, or a broken sequence in that suit, and a desire for someone else to lead the suit instead.

(3) Failure to lead Partner's bid suit may indicate a void in that suit.

(4) Failure to lead trumps, when the auction would seem to call for one, suggests that the opening leader's trump holding might contain an honor that he/she is trying to protect (**Kx**, **Qxx**, **Qx**, **Jxx**, **Jx**, or is a singleton.)

(5) Failure to make an attacking lead, when it has been indicated by the auction, may imply either that the opening leader has nothing with which to attack, or that he/she believes that his/her Partner has few, if any, honor cards to help the defense.

C. The "Rule of Eleven":

If the opening lead is assumed to be 4th-best, especially seen against any No-Trump contract, subtract the value of that card from the number "11" in order to determine exactly how many cards are held by the other three players, other than those held by the opening leader, that can beat the card that was led. Knowing this and seeing what cards you actually hold in your own hand and the Dummy's, you can figure out how many higher cards are held by the Partner of the opening leader.

Examples: If the "5" of a suit is led and you regard it as a 4th-best lead, there are six cards {11-5} above the "5" that are held by the other three players.

If, for example, between your hand and the Dummy's you can see four of them, the opening leader's Partner must hold the other two.

If you see all six of them, the opening leader's Partner must hold none.

If you see more than six, the opening lead was not 4th best.

3. Step II - Bear in Mind the Bidding:

A. If Either Opponent Has Bid, You Have Information Regarding:

(1) How the Opponents' high-card strength is likely to be divided.

Examples: Suppose you have arrived in a **4H** contract and between your hand and the Dummy's there are 24 high-card points.

If one of your Opponents had opened the bidding or overcalled with **1-NT**, he/she is marked with all 16 of the remaining high cards.

If the Opponent's opening bid or overcall had been **1S**, he/she is likely to hold a large share of the missing points, but not necessarily all of them.

(2) How the various suits, whether or not they have been bid, are likely to break.

Examples: (Suppose again you have arrived in a **4H** contract.)

If during the auction one of your Opponents had bid both Diamonds and Spades, he/she must be long in those two suits but short in the other two.

If one of your Opponents had opened the bidding preemptively with **3C**, he/she must hold great length in Clubs (usually seven or more cards) but shortness in the other three suits.)

B. If neither Opponent has bid, you have inferential information based on the failure to open the bidding, to overcall, or to make a Takeout Double: