

BRIDGE – INTERMEDIATE LESSONS II – 08

Opening Leads – Choosing the Suit

The Opponents' bidding gives you a blueprint of their holdings. That information can be used to help one choose the suit that offers the best chance for an effective opening lead. From the Opponent's auction you can learn the size and shape of their respective hands, their combined strength, and how well they match in certain suits. Choosing the specific card to lead within the suit chosen is mostly a matter of applying standardized rules, as summarized within the next Lesson.

In addition, the Opponent's bidding reveals a lot about your Partner's hand. To figure out Partner's point count add your points to their combined count and subtract the total from forty. Any bid that Partner makes can also help your selection of the opening lead. As a general rule, unless an alternative excellent lead exists, always give the highest priority to a suit that Partner has mentioned.

How the Bidding Suggests Which Suit to Lead or Not to Lead

Information Available From the Opponents:

1. Size – The high-card point count from their levels of bidding describes holdings
2. Shape – The suits they bid, or fail to bid, describe their length
3. Their Final Contract and the suits bid during their auction process foretells their combined strength and how they match in certain suits

Information Available From Partner:

1. Any bid that Partner makes gives specific details about his/her size and shape
2. Any suit that Partner mentions should be given top priority

Leads Against No-Trump Contracts

Against a No-Trump contract, the normal lead is from your long suit, (4th best), trying to establish long-card winners. There are three exceptional circumstances, however, for avoiding leading your own long suit:

- 1) The Opponents have bid your long suit, or
- 2) Your Partner has bid another suit, or
- 3) You have a very weak suit and/or an entry-less hand diminishing chances of success.

Leads Against Suit Contracts

Against a Trump (Suit) contract the normal lead is also from a long suit, looking for fast defensive tricks. Short-suit leads and Trump leads, however, do have their place.

Singleton leads are enticing, but to be effective they must offer a very good chance for a defensive ruff. Ideally, Partner should have a strong hand with a fast entry to give you the ruff, and you should have the Ace or King of Trumps to prevent Declarer from drawing all of yours quickly.

A Word of Caution: Singleton leads, or a lead from a worthless doubleton, especially of a suit not bid by Partner, can be dangerous, since they often help the Opponents to develop one of their long side-suits and offer Declarer the likelihood of a free finesse. Trump leads work best whenever Declarer might try for a cross-ruff, whenever the Dummy has ruffing power but not many Trump cards, or whenever you have winners in one of Declarer's side suits that might be trumped away.

Possible Favored Leads

(Not Necessarily in Priority Order)

A. Against Suit Contracts

- Your Suit
- Partner's Suit (Having been bid)
- Partner's suit (Reflected by Partner's "Lead-Directing" Double of any artificial bid)
- Any Un-Bid Suit
- Through Dummy's Strength
- Top of any High Sequence (e.g., KQJ)
- Top of any Low Sequence (e.g., JT9)
- Low from three or more to any honor (Hoping)
- Top of Nothing (Hoping)
- A Singleton or a Doubleton – Looking for a ruff
- An Ace(King) from an Ace-King combination to see Dummy and get an attitude signal from Partner while retaining the lead for trick #2
(Both of the above are best if Partner had bid the suit, and/or you hold a Trump control)
- A Long Suit looking to give Partner a ruff
- A Trump – Led in order to reduce the ruffing power of Dummy – Works best if you or Partner has Declarer's 2nd suit covered
- A Trump from a strong sequence (e.g., KQJT) – To pull Declarer's Trumps and, effectively, convert the contract to one played in No-Trump.

B. Against No-Trump Contracts

- Your Suit (4th from the top of longest and strongest suit – Entries Needed)
- Partner's Suit (Having been bid)
- The 2nd suit bid by the Dummy on the way towards the Opponent's final No-Trump contract
- Any Un-Bid Suit
- Through Dummy's Strength
- Any Safe Lead – (Especially against a Slam or a HCP RHO)
- Top of any High Sequence (e.g., KQJ)
- Top of any Low Sequence (e.g., JT9) or Top of Nothing (Hoping)
- Low from three or more to any honor (Hoping)