

Leading to a Slam

When the opponents bid to a slam it is nice when you have an easy lead (but will it defeat the slam?), but often, if the opponents have bid the hand well, you will have to lead in the dark unless your partner is in a position to make a lead-directing double after the final bid. Sometimes you have no chance as the slam is cold, but other times you have a chance if you get off to the right lead. What is the right lead?

The first thing to remember is that no leading system works all of the time, but if you use a logical system you will defeat the slam more times than most, by using logic. You would think that leading the top of an AK suit would always be right, but unless the slam is silly, at least one of the opponents must be short in that suit, and if void, the lead of this suit could lose a chance to develop a trick in another suit.

Even so, leading the top of an AK suit is still right up there with logical leads, but consider the bidding first to determine if the opponents could have bid the slam with this suit wide open. Unless it is bid as a sacrifice, the stronger you are, the more likely it is that one opponent is void in your best suit.

Now consider a lead-directing double! If the opponents bid freely to a slam, and your partner doubles when it is you that is on lead, the double is calling for an unusual lead. Most commonly it is asking for a lead of dummy's first bid suit, suggesting a void or a good honour holding such as AQ. If dummy has not bid a suit, it is suggesting a void in an outside suit, and you can best lead your longest suit.

If you and your partner have bid and supported a suit, that could be considered the normal opening lead, so double by the player not on lead is often used to suggest the lead of another suit, possibly the first suit bid by dummy. Similarly, if your partner has made a lead-directing double during the auction and then doubles the slam bid, it tends to cancel out the earlier double.

If you have an Ace (or a potential trump trick), and a holding of KQ in an outside suit, it would be normal to lead the King, hopefully to establish the setting trick before your Ace is forced out.

If you have no prospects for a second trick in your hand but you hold an Ace, it may be prudent to lead your Ace, as partner could have the King, and declarer may be able to discard enough losers in this suit unless they are cashed at tricks 1 and 2. Of course the same logic works if your only honour is the King, but this may give away the contract.

A lead of an outside singleton can be quite effective, but is only recommended if you also have at least 2 trumps, that way you get your ruff if partner has the Ace of the suit led, or wins an early trump trick. A singleton lead can damage your partner's hold on the suit, and is generally futile if you only hold a singleton trump and thus cannot ruff the return even if partner wins the trump Ace.

The 2 hands that follow were actually played in April at this club in numerical order, and on board 25 South did not lead the CA and the slam made! On board 26, which followed, after the slam on the previous board had made because the Ace had not been led, South led the DA instead of the CK and the slam made again!

M Bd 26 Dir E Vul All	Q74 T82 9632 J93		On the first board West bid 2D as a game-forcing natural bid, then showed slam interest with 3H over the 3C response. In spite of East showing no interest by raising to 4H, West was not done yet and asked for Key Cards with 4NT, although the void in spades made this dangerous. If 4S could be treated as Void-wood, it is ideal here, but it is more likely to be taken as a cue-bid.	
- K743 KQJ854 A62		AJ2 AQJ65 7 T754	The 5S response, showing 2 Aces and the HQ gave West no choice, and the bad slam was reached.	
	KT98653 9 AT KQ8		South was on lead and West had shown a diamond suit and pushed on to slam despite East's reluctance, so it is a time to set up a trick. This is especially so since South had the vital DA, so it is correct to lead the CK.	
W	N	E	S	On the lead of the CK South can win with the DA when East leads the D7 and cash the setting trick. If South makes a negative lead, as happened at the table, then East can discard the clubs by setting up the diamonds, making 12 tricks.
2D	/	1H 3C	1S /	
3H	/	4H	/	
4NT	/	5S	/	
6H	//			

M Bd 25 Dir N Vul EW	7643 JT 973 KQ54		On the second board, East's 2H response was a negative in EW's bidding system, so perchance East became declarer in 6H and South was on lead with nothing to guide them.	
AKJ AKQ952 A2 72		Q92 8643 KQT JT3	East has reasonable values and 4-card support, so unwisely took over when West showed their heart suit, and since 5D could not be 0 KCs, assumed it was 4 and hoped the fit and West's 2C opening was enough for 12 tricks.	
	T85 7 J8654 A986		North has an easy lead of the CK but since East bid hearts first, the spotlight now fell onto South and they had to make a decision as to whether to go on attack or defence!	
W	N	E	S	It has been stated in the bridge literature that every time you lead a new suit, including the opening lead, you give away half a trick, and with isolated honours, it is often correct to make a negative lead.
2C	/	/	/	
3H	/	2H!	/	
5D	/	4NT 6H	/	
			//	
				This time South has only one real value and the advantage of laying down the CA is that they will be able to see dummy and get a signal from partner before making the next lead. On a club lead and continuation 6H goes off, on any other lead it makes.