

Opening Leads

Opening leads are the most important part of the defence, for it is then that the defenders have the tempo to develop their tricks. This is especially important if Declarer has to relinquish the lead to a defender during the play of the hand.

Opening leads are made with only the leader's hand and the bidding to guide the choice of opening lead, and as such, even when a strong opening lead is evident, they are not always successful. Leading partner's suit is often a good start.

While it is important to set up your tricks via the opening lead, it can be equally important to avoid giving Declarer a cheap trick from a bad opening lead. When a strong opening lead is not available, this may mean making a negative opening lead.

Strong opening leads include leading from a sequence of 3 or more honours, the strongest being AKQ(x), and the weakest being JT9(x). The lead of the top honour in a sequence is normal, and the lead of the King from KQJ(x) has the advantage of giving Declarer nothing (the Ace is always a trick), and setting up at least 2 tricks for the defence, unless it is a suit contract and Declarer or Dummy is short. Either way, the lead gives little away to Declarer.

Opening leads in a suit contract can be different to those in a notrump contract. While it is often right to lead away from an Ace (even 4th highest from AKxx) in a notrump contract, it

is a good idea NOT to lead away from an Ace in a suit contract. In a suit contract, if you decide that a suit such as Axx(x) should be led, lead the Ace! However, the lead of the Ace may give Declarer a cheap trick and the lead of another suit may be more productive in defeating the contract.

In a notrump contract, 4th highest of your longest and strongest suit is still recommended, as long as Declarer or Dummy has not bid the suit naturally, and this is also valid in a suit contract, as long as the suit is not headed by the Ace.

In general, the lead of a low card, either as the opening lead or during the play of the hand, should indicate that you have at least 1 honour card in the suit led. If you lead a suit without any honour cards, lead the second highest (Middle Up Down – MUD), and follow up with the highest card next if appropriate. When leading a suit with 2 low cards and 1 higher card, such as 842, it may even be better to lead the 8!

Lead 4th highest from a 4-card suit headed by 2 honours, although in a suit contract, do not underlead an Ace and if the 2 honours are in sequence, in a suit contract it may be better to lead the top card of the sequence.

If you have a long suit in which Declarer is likely to be void, it may be better to lead a side suit such as KQx, or QJT to try and set up a trick while you have the tempo. If declarer trumps your opening lead, then Declarer has the tempo and may be able to set up their suit for discards before your side next regains the lead.

