

## OPENING LEADS AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT – CHOOSING THE RIGHT SUIT

If the opening leader holds a sequence of honours against a suit contract, this is usually the best lead. If not, it is often correct to make an attacking lead from a broken suit. But there are situations where a passive lead is better.

### SETTING UP WINNERS – SAFE ATTACKING LEADS

When the opponents bid to a suit contract in confident fashion, they will usually be able to make their contract, if they are given time to do so. To defeat (for example) a 4♥ contract, the defenders often need to set up 4 tricks first.

The first of the following hands is the ideal sort for leading against a suit contract:

♠ 5 4 3	♠ 5 4 3
♥ Q 7 4	♥ Q 7 4
♦ A 6 2	♦ A 6 2
♣ K Q J 7	♣ K J 7 2

After virtually any auction to a final contract of 4♥, the best lead is ♣K, with the idea of knocking out the opponents' ♣A. It's possible that ♥Q will win a trick, in which the opening leader might also make ♦A and ♣QJ. This would be enough to defeat 4♥.

Unfortunately, the opening leader doesn't always have such an ideal hand: consider the second hand, which has ♣Q replaced by ♣2. Against some auctions it could still be right to make the attacking lead of a club, hoping that partner holds ♣A or ♣Q. But against other auctions the passive lead of a spade would be a better choice.

### WHEN TO MAKE A SPECULATIVE ATTACKING LEAD

When choosing an opening lead, it's very important to take the bidding into account. In the absence of a safe honour sequence, there are two main reasons for choosing an attacking lead:

- The auction may highlight a long side suit in dummy that could be set up.
- The auction may suggest that the opponents have strength in reserve.

In these situations, the opening leader should normally try to set up tricks for the defence, even if it looks risky. For example:

SOUTH	S	W	N	E
♠ 6 3				
♥ K J 7 5				1♠
♦ A 4 2	pass	2♦	pass	2♠
♣ 9 6 4 3	pass	4♠	all pass	

Here, dummy's diamond could provide discards once ♦A is knocked out. The best opening lead is therefore a heart, the stronger of the unbid suits. It is possible that a heart lead could give away a trick, but it's generally worth taking the risk.

## WHEN TO MAKE A PASSIVE OPENING LEAD

Sometimes the opponents are short of tricks and would struggle to make their contract without help from the defence. For example, in the auction 1NT – 2♣ (Stayman) – 2♥ – 3♥ – 4♥, opener has a balanced hand and the opponents don't have strength in reserve. Here, the opening leader should often concentrate on not giving away tricks. This is known as passive defence.

A passive opening lead is also indicated when the opening leader has some well-placed high cards, or suspects that suits are breaking badly. For example:

SOUTH				
	S	W	N	E
♠ K Q 10 3				
♥ K J 7				1♥
♦ K 4 2	pass	1♠	pass	2♥
♣ 10 9 3	pass	pass	pass	

There's no need to make an attacking lead in spades when dummy has bid the suit. This would be costly if dummy has ♠J and declarer has ♠A. The best lead is a club, which is virtually safe.

## HOLDING A SIDE SUIT ACE

If the opening leader holds an AK combination, the ace is normally a good lead. But without the king, leading an ace is usually wrong. Leading from an AQ or AJ combination is particularly likely to cost a trick. But if the bidding indicates that a particular suit needs to be attacked, then leading an unsupported ace is often right.

Leading an unsupported ace is often a good idea when declarer opened with a pre-emptive bid.

## WHEN SUITS HAVE BEEN BID

When partner has bid a suit, it's generally right to lead it. Even if it turns out to be wrong on a particular hand, partner will understand. The main reason for not leading partner's suit is when the ace is held, but the king is not. In that case it may be right to wait for partner to lead the suit.

When the opponents have bid a suit (in a natural sense), it's generally wrong to lead it. This may sometimes reduce the choices available to the opening leader. The result is that suits such as Kxx or Qxxx may need to be considered. Although leading from these suits isn't ideal, the bidding may suggest that partner will have strength, in which case it could be possible to cash or establish a trick or two in the suit.

It can sometimes be right to lead dummy's second suit, especially from a sequence such as J109x.

## PLAYING FOR A RUFF

If the opening leader has a singleton in a side suit, it can be best to lead it, in the hope of obtaining a ruff before declarer has a chance to draw trumps. This hand is ideal:

SOUTH				
	S	W	N	E
♠ Q 10 7 3				
♥ K 8 7				1♥
♦ 2	pass	3♥	pass	4♥
♣ 10 9 6 4 2	pass	pass	pass	

Our own weak hand suggests that partner may have reasonable values. If these include ♦A, the lead of ♦2 would lead to an immediate diamond ruff. If not, we might get on lead with ♥K, lead a black suit to partner's ace and ruff the diamond return. But don't lead a singleton:

- without a "spare" small trump (e.g. a holding of Ax or Kxx);
- if partner is likely to be weak;
- if it's a king or queen (unless partner has bid the suit).

It can also sometimes be right to lead a doubleton, although here there's much less chance of a ruff. But avoid leading a doubleton if the opponents have bid the suit, or with an unsupported honour – even leading from 10x can give away a trick.

## LEADING A TRUMP

Against a suit contract it may be correct to lead a trump. Sometimes this is suggested by the auction, or sometimes a trump is an effective passive lead. But on many hands a trump is the worst possible lead. Further information is provided in [Trump Leads](#) handout.

## ATTACKING OR PASSIVE OPENING LEAD?

When in doubt, it's generally best to choose an attacking lead. Often the lead doesn't actually give away a trick, or sometimes the passive lead doesn't turn out to be particularly safe.

An additional factor is the form of scoring. Playing match point pairs (the most common form of duplicate) it can be better to concentrate on minimising overtricks, rather than actively try to defeat the contract. A passive lead can therefore often lead to a good match point score, even when the contract makes. But in a Teams competition (or at rubber bridge) it's the making or defeating of the contract that is important, so there's more case for taking risks with the opening lead.