

OPENING LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS by Maritha (rev.7/13)

Depending on the contract, differing styles of opening leads are called for.

Trump Leads

Trump leads are often best when:

- 1) The opponents have made a sacrifice bid & hope to score tricks through a cross-ruff. A trump lead will cut down on their cross-ruff. Your top trick winners will not go away. Lead a trump!
- 2) The opponents have bid a grand slam. Rarely will they bid a grand slam missing anything in the trump suit. A trump lead can be a good lead against a small slam but NOT if you know the opponents might be missing the trump queen; not usually when you have a singleton trump; and not when you suspect that an attacking lead is essential.
- 3) The opponents have struggled to bid game—unlikely to have any extras anywhere—and you have scattered honors in all the other suits. You hope that a trump lead is the least likely lead to give away a trick.
- 4) Declarer has bid two suits and dummy has taken a simple preference to one. This is especially true when Dummy takes a preference to a 2nd suit and you have lots of strength in Declarer's first-bid suit.
- 5) When partner has passed your one-level take-out double for penalties, it demands a trump lead.

Underleading Honors

- 1) It is rarely right to underlead an Ace against a suit contract. (You might not get your Ace later.) Occasionally, when dummy has shown a stopper in that suit (presumably the King) and you are pretty sure that Declarer has at least two, you might underlead your Ace hoping partner has queen and dummy has the King and the Jack.
- 2) If you decide to lead away from an honor, it is generally better (in a suit contract) to underlead lower honor than a higher one. When you have 4 trump (or suspect partner has 4), lead your longest suit.
- 3) It is rarely right to lead away from a tenace holding against a suit contract (e.g., AQxx or KJxx), however if the bidding makes it clear that the opponents do not have a stopper in that suit, it is imperative to lead the suit right away to make sure you get the tricks to which you are entitled. For example, 1C-P-1H-P-3C-P-3S-P-4H-P-5C-P-P-P. No matter what you holding in the suit, lead a diamond. Neither opponent should have a diamond stopper on this bidding.
- 4) When either opponent has shown a long, strong side suit (on which to pitch losers), it is imperative to make an aggressive lead. Be willing to underlead one or even two honors (e.g., Kxxx or KJxx—lead low).

Singleton Leads

The best time to lead a singleton is when you have a very weak hand. In that case, partner is marked for strength and is likely to have an entry or two to give you your ruff. If you have a strong hand, do NOT lead a singleton. (Singleton leads can help set up a side suit for Declarer.)

Doubleton Leads

Doubleton Leads (as well as top of nothing) can be effective IF they are not a side suit that has been bid by one of the opponents. The best time to lead a doubleton is when you have a relatively weak hand (so partner is marked with some strength) and trump control (Axx or Kxx). Sometimes your doubleton is partner's best suit.

Listen to the Auction

If partner makes an overcall, lead his/her suit! If partner makes a double of an artificial bid, lead that suit. If partner had an opportunity to make a one-level overcall and did NOT or did NOT double an artificial bid, try something different. If you know partner is short (opponents bid & supported a side suit & you have 4), lead it!

Attacking versus Passive Leads

When the opponents have struggled to reach their contract, a passive lead (top of a sequence, top of nothing or a trump lead) is often best. When the opponents have shown extra power or a long side suit, an aggressive, attacking lead (underleading one or two honors or even leading an Ace without having the King as well) is often best. Listen to the auction!