RULE OF 11 and "TOP OF NOTHING"

The **Rule of 11** is used often by defenders (although Declarer can also use the rule). If you are using 4th-best leads, the Rule of 11 applies. When **your partner leads a card that looks like 4th-best** in a suit (usually against no trump, but sometimes against a suit), **subtract that card from 11**. Your answer tells you how many cards are in your hand, dummy, and Declarer's hand that are **above** the card your partner has led.

Since you can see the cards above your partner's card that are in your hand and in Dummy, you know by subtraction how many cards (above your partner's card) are in Declarer's hand.

Suppose, for example, that your partner leads the 6 of hearts against 3NT. When you subtract 6 from 11, the answer is 5. So, five cards exist in dummy, your hand, and Declarer's hand that are above your partner's 6. If dummy has K72 and you hold AJ9, you can see all five of those cards in your hand and in dummy. So, if Declarer plays the 2, you play the 9. If Declarer plays the 7, you play the 9. If Declarer plays the King, you play the Ace. (Incidentally, by elimination you know that your partner has Q1086 and could have a smaller card such as the 3, 4, or 5.)

Suppose that your partner leads the 5 of hearts against 3NT. When you subtract 5 from 11, the answer is 6. So, six cards exist in dummy, your hand, and Declarer's hand that are above your partner's 5-spot. If dummy has Q72 and you hold AJ9, you can see five of the six cards above your partner's 5-spot. Therefore, Declarer only has one card higher—most likely either the King or the 10. If Declarer plays low, you play the jack. If the jack holds, play the Ace and then lead to your partner's known King. If Declarer takes the King, hope that your partner can lead the suit again later.

TOP OF NOTHING

Sometimes you elect not to lead from your longest suit at NT. (It could be that dummy or Declarer has bid your suit. It could be that you have no entries, so you want to try to find partner's suit. It could be that you overcalled and Declarer announced a sure stopper in your suit and you hold a tenace holding such as AQ10xx or KJ9xx and want to reach partner's hand, so that partner can lead through Declarer into your strength.)

When you lead a suit in which you have no interest in having partner return, lead "top of nothing." That tells partner to try a different suit if s/he gets in or, at least, you have no help for partner in this suit. For example, if you hold AQ9x   983   xx J10xx and the bidding goes 1S on your right, 2C on your left, 2NT on your right and 3NT on your left, you will not lead a spade (RHO's known 5-card suit), nor should you lead a club (as RHO is likely to have 5 of them). You will lead "top of nothing" in hearts and hope that partner has four or more hearts. **"Top of Nothing" leads apply in suits as well as no trumps.** Leading low promises an honor. Leading highish (but NOT an honor) is usually "Top Of Nothing." The mnemonic is **BOSTON: Bottom Of Something; Top Of Nothing."**

If you are playing "top of nothing" leads and partner leads a card for which you get an "impossible" answer in terms of the Rule of 11, assume that the lead is "top of nothing." Suppose, for example, partner leads the 7 of hearts against a NT contract. Dummy shows up with KJ4 and you hold Q1085. Declarer plays low and you insert the 10. Declarer wins with the Ace. Don't blame the Rule of 11! Partner is leading "top of nothing." (Rule of 11 would say that only 4 cards above the 7 exist in dummy, Declarer's hand, and your hand. You can see five right away and the Ace makes 6, so you know that partner's lead is NOT 4th-best, so is probably "top of nothing.")

Some partners prefer that leading low (4th-best) should always promise at least one honor. (Generally, a 10 counts as an honor in no trump.) Therefore, if you have a bad 4-card suit (no honor) and you wish to lead it, these partners will lead their highest (of two equals) or 2nd-highest card in the suit so that partner will know (when the Rule of 11 fails) that it is a "top of nothing" lead. For example, from 9842 of spades, lead the 9. From 9743, lead the 7. (The 9 might be too valuable to sacrifice at trick one.)