

As declarer, how often do you let your opponents see your cards ? "Never" you will reply but every bridge player has done it at some point and many still do so on a regular basis. Here are a couple of examples to show you exactly what I mean :

xxx (dummy)

Axx                      xx

KQJ109 (declarer)

There is a certain type of declarer who always leads the 9, knowing, smugly, that only the Ace can beat this card. West plays low, not wanting to waste his Ace and hoping that his partner can win the trick more cheaply. When his partner fails to do this, West knows that declarer started with a suit headed KQJ109. As declarer, why on earth would you want to give this information to your opponents ? The correct card to lead is the King. They might think you've got the Queen too but they won't know about the J109.

xxx

10xxx                      Qx

AKJx

West leads his fourth highest card, East plays the Queen and declarer wins with the King. West now knows that declarer also holds the Ace and the Jack. Thanks !

If East had held the Ace then he'd have played it, not the Queen. And if East's cards were headed QJ, he would have played the Jack - third hand defender plays the lower of touching cards - instead of the Queen. Therefore South's cards must be headed AKJ. In the context of the whole hand, it could be that South had opened the bidding with 1NT ... in which case West now knows the location of 8 of declarer's 12-14 points after just one trick has been played. Thanks again !

Declarer should win the trick with his Ace - the higher of touching cards. Now West cannot be sure if the suit is distributed as above, or like this :

xxx

10xxx                      KQx

AJx

So, when you are declarer, *lead* the top card from sequences and *win with* the top card from sequences.

Leading the top card from an *internal* sequence can sometimes give declarer an advantage too. How would you play this suit so as to maximise your chances of making four tricks :

Axxx (dummy)

KJ109 (you)

Early in the play, and with no opposition bidding, you don't know where the missing Queen is located. You might decide to lead the 9 to dummy's Ace and then finesse on the way back. That's fair enough but why not begin by leading the Jack instead of the 9 ? If West has the guarded Queen, perhaps Qxx or Qxxx, he will not hesitate to play low on the lead of the 9 but he might pause for thought if you

lead the Jack ... and that pause is all you need. If West does not hold the Queen, he will have no reason to pause. You will go up with the Ace and finesse on the way back.

On the other hand, there are some occasions when declarer does best *not* to lead his highest card from a sequence. Consider this layout from a hand played at Shoreham in early April :

K652 (dummy)

Q                      A843

J1097 (declarer)

Declarer led the Jack, covered in turn by the Queen, King and won by East's Ace. East switched to a different suit, removing dummy's only remaining entry and declarer returned to the suit above, leading the 2 back towards his hand and playing the 10 when East followed with the 3. No luck - West showed out and East's remaining 84 proved good enough to act as a second stopper.

Declarer was always going to run the Jack if West had followed a low card and you might think it was just bad luck to find the suit distributed as it was. But what if declarer had begun by leading the 9 instead of the Jack ?

When the Queen appears from West, declarer should ask himself why West has voluntarily played this card ... unless he had no choice and started with a singleton Queen or AQ doubleton. After the lead of the 9, surely no West in the known universe would play the Queen from a holding of Qx or Qxx. Now the winning play is obvious - finesse the 7 on the way back. If this happens to lose to West's original Q8 doubleton then (a) make a mental note never to play against this West again, and/or (b) suggest that the two of you have a game some time with a view to arranging a more permanent partnership !

Enjoy your bridge !