

The Bridge Booklet

(BB08)

Pearls from Brian



What to Lead

The Rule of 11 and
4th Highest Against
Suits

Attitude vs NT

Trump Leads Against
Sacrifices

Trump Leads

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Overcalled Suit

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Lesson 1: What to Lead?

To Suit Contracts:

You usually want to make a "safe" opening lead that will set up tricks for your side without giving declarer extra tricks. Your general order of preference can be:

A singleton (hoping partner can lead the suit back for you to trump).

A suit partner has bid. Lead *low* if you have 3+ cards; lead *high* from 2 cards.

A suit that offers a good attacking combination two or more touching honors (KQ10x, QJ10, AKxx, J109).

Your longest suit. Lead *low* if you don't have touching honors

A suit the opponents have not bid.

If there are no unbid suits, choose a suit that dummy has bid.

Lead trumps if you have no other safe lead *OR* if declarer has shown a two-suited hand. This may prevent declarer from using dummy's trumps separately.

When leading to a suit contract, **AVOID:**

Leading an unsupported ace if you have another safe lead.

Underleading an ace (don't lead a small card from a suit headed by the ace).

Underleading broken honor combinations (KJxx, Q10x) unless it's in partner's suit.

Leading a suit declarer has bid (unless you're leading trumps).

To Notrump Contracts:

You usually want to make an attacking opening lead to set up tricks in your long suit. Lead the fourth-best card (count down from the top) from your longest and strongest suit *unless:*

Partner has bid a suit. You should then lead his suit.

Your long suit is one the opponents have bid. You should choose your longest unbid suit or a suit dummy has bid.

Your long suit has three or more touching honors (KQJx,

J 9 7 5 3

Q 10 9 7

9 7 5 3

A 10 9 4 2

K Q 10 9 2

A K J 10 2

A K Q 10 2

A Q J 10 2

A K J 9 2

A K 10 9 2

A Q 10 9 2

A Q 9 3 2

A 10 9 3 2

C5 - standard 4th best from an honor

9 - shows two higher, one of which must be the **10**

C7 or **C9**- without honor, lead top or next to top

9 - shows two higher, one of which must be the **10**

Q - while **K** seems normal, a better treatment is the lead of the **A** or **Q** asks

A - asking for an unblock or count

9 *exceptionally*. Leading the **10** may confuse partner the lead was from a sequence. It's far better to ensure partner knows leader has at least two honors above the opening lead rather than be misled into believing Declarer has all the honors

Lead the **3**. While leading the **9** shows two cards above its value, by common agreement one of the outstanding honors must be the **10**. Thus, lead fourth best **3**, hoping partner holds the **K** or **J**.

This time lead the **9**. The lead of the **9** shows two cards above its value, one of which must be the **10**.

Lesson11: Coded Nines and Tens (Jack Denies, 10 Implies)

This is an opening lead system designed to show honor holdings. A lead of a 9 or 10 implies either **zero** or **two** higher honors in the suit led, while leading a Jack suggests no higher honors. Normal "low from honor" lead carding still applies, as 4th best, etc. When partner leads a 9 or 10, partner generally assumes leader has 2 cards above *unless* the player in the third seat can see the complimentary card. So if leader plays the 10 and the 9 is in either the dummy or the hand of third seat player, assume **zero** above; the same is true if the 9 is lead and the 10 is visible. Otherwise, assume partner has 2 cards above the 10 or 9. Incidentally, a common treatment is that the lead of the 9 **promises** one of the two higher honors is the 10 (otherwise, simply lead fourth best from a broken honor sequence when not holding the 10). Particularly against opponent's Notrump contract, leads include:

Suit	Lead
J 10 8 2	Jack - Jack denies (normally top of sequence, maybe broken)
Q J 9 2	Q - lead the top of broken sequence (not the 9, which could lose to opponents 10)
A J 10 4	10 - shows two higher
K 10 9 3	9 - shows two higher, one of which must be the 10
Q 10 9 7	9 - shows two higher, one of which must be the 10

QJ10x, AQJ10x, J109x, etc.). You should lead an honor to be sure you force declarer to win with the highest card possible.

When leading to a notrump contract, **AVOID**:

- Leading a short suit, unless it's the suit partner has bid.
- Leading aces or "unprotected" high cards, especially ones in your short suits.
- Leading a suit declarer has bid

Which Card?

- From all **AK** combinations, lead the **King**.
- From all other suits with touching honors, lead the top honor: **KQ5**, **J109**, **QJ103**, **10985**, **KJ1054**
- From a 4-card-or-longer suit without touching honors, lead the fourth-best card: 1075**2**, J87**6**43
- From a 3-card suit without touching honors, lead the lowest card: J9**6**, Q4**3**, 86**5**
- From a 2-card suit, lead the top card: **82**, **J7**, **Q10**

Lesson 2: The Rule of Eleven

This "rule" or mathematical certainty applies whenever a "fourth best" lead is made, either against a No Trump contract (common) or a Suit contract (rare).

The benefits of such a revealing lead are as follows:

- Partner is forced to study the spot card. Is the opening leader leading his lowest card (4 card suit)? Or does the spot card indicate a longer suit? Look carefully at the spot cards in Dummy and your *own* hand to make this assessment.
- Partner must do the math (subtract the spot card from eleven) to arrive at further deductions.
- Partner must deduce, with 100% certainty, how many cards Declarer holds that are higher than the opening lead spot card.
- Partner must decide what card he should play at trick one. "Third Hand High" is no longer automatic, especially if both he and Dummy hold an honour card.

Unfortunately, all the obvious deductions to be made from a 4th best lead are also available to Declarer. In spite of this fact, given that Defence is more difficult than Dummy Play, any card made by the opening leader that conveys specific information to partner is valuable to "building a defence". Thus, the benefits of the 4th best lead outweigh the disadvantages.

Obviously, "4th best" does not apply when Partner leads an honour {A, K, Q, J, 10}. Note that "Standard" honor card leads are highlighted in the last *section* of any convention card. Partner may also be leading "top of nothing" from a holding such as 9863. He may even be trying to "find" your suit, leading from top from 973. Experts lead the second highest from holdings such as 86432.

Simply, if the math doesn't work, opening leader is not

By the way, if partner leads the A against a NT contract and you encourage, if he continues with the K, he is leading a short suit. If he had length, he would continue with a small card.

Whatever method your partnership prefers to use, nothing replaces sound judgment and counting.

Brian

Lesson 10: A=Attitude / K=Count

For decades, the standard lead from an AK sequence was the Ace (top of touching honors), reversing the process against suit contracts to show a doubleton. Against NT contracts, the lead of an Ace asked partner to play his highest card (unblocking).

Sounds simple? This game never is. One frequent ambiguity involved leading A from Ax against suit contracts, looking for a ruff. Another was leading A from AKx against NT contracts, hoping to hit partner's long suit. Should partner unblock with Qxx? Agh!!!

No method is perfect to meet all possibilities; however, in my experience the A=Attitude/K=Count method works well, assuming that partner signals intelligently.

Note that the A or K may be led from any AK sequence, depending on whether attitude or count takes priority. Partner's "carding" is assumed to be "standard": high to encourage/low to discourage; up the line to show an odd number/high-low to show an even number. Opening leader simply must decide what information is required before opting for the A or K.

Note that this agreement may be used effectively against both suit and NT contracts. Also, it may be used at any time in the hand, not just on opening lead.

Every silver lining has some clouds. No longer can opening leader assure a doubleton AK. The lead of the King may be ambiguous: from AK or KQ. In the latter case, partner is unable to signal encouragement with Jxx. If partner leads the K and the A appears on Dummy, should attitude take prevalence over count?

leading 4th best. Nor is he particularly interested in having "his suit" led back. You need to do some serious thinking. "ARCH" (a thinking tool) is a later lesson.

Let me toss a life line to all the novice, intermediate and even some advanced players who simply enjoy the game without doing all the math and heavy thinking. A simpler method of leading exists ... but that's for next week.

Ask yourself why you really play this game. If fun and camaraderie are high on your list, then you don't need or want to get into this much complexity. Yes, I know, winning is more fun than losing ... but is your enjoyment of the game about ego or masterpoints? For advanced/expert/world class players, this game is about high level problem solving, thinking way beyond normal capacities, arriving at the "AHA" light bulb moment. Just as with the body, the more that you exercise your brain, the more "alive" you feel.

As old farts, we all need to keep our bodies and minds fit. We need to stretch a bit.

Brian

Lesson 3: 4th Highest Against Suit Contracts

(Dir S / NS Vul)

	54	
	AJ3	
	K1052	
	8765	
73		KQ1062
Q952		4
Q876		AJ93
J93		K104
	AJ98	
	K10876	
	4	
	AQ2	

THE BIDDING: 1H P 2H 2S
 P P P

COMMENTARY: Playing Matchpoints, South might make an aggressive penalty double of 2S. Also, North players unfamiliar with Cohen's Law of Total Tricks might compete to 3H. Both actions are fraught with risk.

DEFENSIVE STRATEGY: South should proceed with a "FORCING DEFENCE". His plan is to repeatedly make Declarer trump Hearts, ultimately giving South control of the Trump suit and domination of the "END GAME" (the last few tricks).

OPENING LEAD: H7. North should assume 4th best. North can also deduce that South has good Trumps. Otherwise the opening lead would be from shortness, looking for ruffs.

THE PLAY: Granted, the cards sit badly for Declarer. Still, *if N/S* persist *in* shortening Wests trumps by forcing him to ruff, down 3 should be a standard result. At trick one, if

Before leading a singleton, especially in an unbid suit, consider the following:

- Does partner have any values that may allow him to win a couple of early tricks to give you some ruffs? Based on the bidding, work out partner's rough point count
- Has partner had the opportunity to overcall is suit easily? Playing Matchpoints, good partners stretch to direct an opening lead. If our partner is aggressive, but has been silent, you might consider another choice

Simply, think twice before leading a singleton.

Brian

Lesson 9: Beware Of Leading Singletons Against Suit Contracts

(Brian's BOLS tip)

Yeah, I know ... Benito Garrazo strongly advocates leading a singleton (if nothing better is available).

And Larry Cohen comments: "I love them" (singleton leads).

But these guys are world class; they use judgment. Most of us, on the other hand, are more fallible.

Even Cohen cautions against singleton leads when:

- The singleton is a trump The singleton is a King
- A better alternative (KQJx) exists
- You don't want a ruff (natural trump trick like QJx)
- You hold long strong trumps and want to force Declarer to shorten his Trumps

But it is (relatively) "safe" to lead a singleton when:

- Partner has bid the suit
- Partner has shown some strength
- You hold a Trump control (Axx)
- Nothing else is attractive

Be wary of leading a singleton because:

- 12 cards in the suit are out there among 3 hands. Chances are that you're helping to establish the opponents' second suit and finessing your partner
- Any astute Declarer can spot a singleton. No only can he play that suit to best advantage, but using the Law of Empty Spaces he can draw inferences about other suits, especially Trumps

Declarer plays the H2 from Dummy, South (using the Rule of 11) can confidently play small, allowing North to continue the assault on Dummy's HQ.

CONCLUSIONS: Note that the standard lead of a singleton is not recommended with a strong trump holding. The expert will prefer to attack Declarer's trumps by leading his longest, strongest side suit. This example is a set lesson hand. If Dummy came down with 73, 2, Q8763, J10943, North should win the HJ and shift to the S5 to prevent Dummy from getting any cheap Heart ruffs.

Although opening leader may begin an attack with a plan, the appearance of Dummy may force a strategy change. Still 4th best against suit contracts (don't ever underlead an ACE) allows partner to confidently use the Rule of 11

Brian

Lesson 4: Attitude Leads against NT Contracts

In his book, "Larry Teaches Opening Leads", Cohen states:

"Something called the Rule of 11 will be applicable if you lead 4th best. Realize that experienced declarers will also draw inferences from the size of the spot card you lead (they can also use the Rule of 11). Playing with an inexperienced partner (who won't even notice which spot card you've led) against an experienced declarer, you'd be better off choosing the spot card closest to your thumb."

Based on many years of playing "Attitude Leads", I don't believe that your lead should be quite so random, even if your partner is "inexperienced" or unable to understand and apply the Rule of 11.

BOSTON, an acronym for "Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing", gives you clear direction for Attitude Leads. Simply, from a good suit, such as KJ863, lead your lowest card. From a bad suit, such as 97542, lead the highest card that you can afford (I like second from the top because there is less chance that I am giving away a trick in the suit).

Once your card is led, partner should use the first part of ARCH, an acronym to help focus thinking:
A= analyze the lead; **R**=review the bidding; **C**=count HCPs and distribution; **H**=how best to proceed.

Attitude leads against NT contracts have two advantages:

Partner can quickly scan the spot cards in Dummy and his own hand to assess the quality of your suit; Declarer can no longer use the Rule of 11 to play the hand to best advantage.

For beginners, Attitude-leads provide more freedom.

second suit?

7. Defense is the most difficult part of the game. The opening lead is the most difficult part of the defense. Stick to basics. Save your creative ego for Declarer play, where Partner (as Dummy) plays no role.
8. As an experienced Declarer, I "feast" on opponents who ignore their partner's overcall.
9. Better that your partnership should remain respectful, that your games should be "steady" (50-60%) than trying to fly solo, with occasional heights of grandeur, but frequent crashes.
10. Better in long sessions (tournaments) to maintain a harmonious partnership than one filled with pent-up frustrations, anger, and accusations.

Brian

Lesson 8: Commandment #1 - Lead Partner's Overcalled Suit

Let's put the game in perspective: No iron-clad rule always works. This is after all, just a game, with zillions of combinations, where nothing about the opening lead is really absolute. But partner is your only ally at the table and in this initial salvo (each hand being a battle, each session a war), he has (sometimes daringly, perhaps suicidally) made a bid to direct your attack.

The most common scenario occurs when partner has overcalled and the opponents arrive (with considerable confidence) in 3NT. Yes, I know ... you have a singleton in partner's suit ... and you do have a decent suit of your own ... and yes, once in a while you may strike gold by ignoring partner's bid.

BUT ... for all those other hands, when faithfully leading partner's suit would have proven more successful, you have really TRAINWRECKED your partnership.

WHY LEAD PARTNER'S OVERCALLED SUIT????

1. His suit has texture and/or length and he has one or two side suit cards that may provide entries to continue the assault.
2. He "stretched" to bid because he knows that your "natural" lead will prove disastrous.
3. Although you may have a "good" suit of your own, you probably don't have a sure "entry".
4. Leading your own suit may take the only entry out of partner's hand.
5. If apologies crop up in the post mortem, better that partner should be contrite for a bad overcall than you for not showing any trust or respect for partner.
6. Declarer already knows about partner's suit. Do you really want to give him clues to playing a

Mantras such as "always return your partners suit" or "breaking open a new suit usually costs a trick" no longer apply when partners lead clearly indicates a bad suit.

Attitude Leads give the opening leader more freedom. Often, he will be "tented" over Declarer's first bid suit but needs the attack to come from partner's side. In such situations, a passive lead (Say the 9 from 984) through one of Dummy's suits (or the unbid suit) will alert partner to the situation.

Speaking as an "experienced declarer", I use the Rule of 11 every time I play a NT contract. Generally, RHO is short in the suit led; Declarer and Dummy often hold intermediate spot cards that can be used for finessing with 100% assurance. Declarer may also know immediately if the lead is from a 4 card suit, giving him options in the play.

In my opinion, 4th best leads give an edge to Declarer (who holds the bulk of strength and can use two hands to the best advantage).

Unless Declarer asks, you need not disclose Attitude leads, albeit they should be clearly marked on your convention card.

Brian

Lesson 5:- Trump Leads Against Obvious Sacrifices

When you feel like you're being robbed, when you hold enough points for game or slam, and the pesky opponents outbid you because they have a fit and favorable vulnerability, then they are clearly sacrificing.

For example, from last Monday: Board 21 Dir N Vul N/S

	AK73		
	AKQ9		
	K63		
	42		
Q10652		J94	
5		2	
AQ1098		J54	
Q6		KJ10953	
	8		
	J1087643		
	72		
	A87		

The Auction might proceed:

1C	P	1H	Dbl
4H	4S	P	P
Dbl	P	P	P

North's jump to 4H shows roughly 20 support points. Against 15, North must double to punish the thieves.

Because N/S hold the bulk of the HCPs, a trump lead is essential. Indeed, any time that the opponents are sacrificing after one of them has shown a two-suiter, repeated trump leads are often the most punishing defense. The purpose of trump leads is to deplete the "short hand" of trumps to prevent ruffs, potentially setting up the sacrificer's "second suit".

The second suit in West's hand is Diamonds. Switch a few cards in that suit around so that North may hold 2 or 3

suits "up the line" if he has sufficient strength to force to game. Otherwise, he would bypass the Diamond suit and bid Spades immediately.

3. Lead a Trump when experienced opponents have freely bid a Grand Slam. The assumption here is that the Trump suit is solid and you are giving them nothing. They have likely employed RKCB to ensure quality trumps and no quick losers.

Beware of such leads if your opponents are inexperienced or insanely aggressive.

Note that leads against Small Slams tend to be aggressive (often underleading a Q or K) in the hope of establishing a setting trick. Against a Grand Slam, you don't really expect to win a trick; therefore, a passive lead often works best.

Brian

Lesson 7: When to Lead Trump

The 3 "standard" recommended trump leads that follow occur rarely but are based on sound reasoning.

1. Lead a Trump when your partner has PASSED your direct position TAKEOUT DOUBLE at the ONE LEVEL, especially if Opener has bid a Major suit. So ... if RHO opens with 1S and you make a takeout double holding something like x, AQxx, K xx, Q10xx, you should not erupt into a frenzy when Partner Passes. If your partner is "disciplined", his holding in the trump suit should be long and "textured", something like KQJ98x or QJ109 x. His PASS demands that you lead Trump so that Declarer won't score cheap Trump tricks by ruffing.

Note that defence against 1C or 1D Doubled does not require such formidable Trumps because Opener has not promised 5 cards in the suit. Note also that if the Takeout Double occurs in the "Balancing" position, partner can opt to defend with a weaker trump holding because he is "over" Declarer. Trump Leads are not "automatic" or even recommended in such situations.

2. Lead a Trump when the opponents have naturally bid all the other suits; for example 1C – 1D – 1H – 1S - 2S - 4S.

Auctions such as this invite trump leads because the opponents may have a fit only in the trump suit and their side suits may not be sufficiently long or strong enough to "set up". Opener appears to have a 3 suited hand with Diamond shortness. Responder appears to have only 4 cards total in Clubs & Hearts. A crossruff may be the best strategy for Declarer.

In the auction given, note that Responder may bid his

natural tricks and East may hold a singleton (as is often the case), and you can see why trump leads are critical.

Aggressive matchpoint players view a NV 4S sacrifice over the opponents' VUL 4H contract as almost automatic. Face the facts, if 4H makes, then you can go down 3 at 4S doubled (making only seven tricks) and still get a good board.

To sum up, if the opponents use an Unusual NoTrump or a Michaels cue bid to reach their sacrifice level, start with a trump and evaluate the situation.

Brian

Lesson 6: Trump Leads

A word of warning: a trump lead can prove fatal to the defense. First, it gives Declarer timing: you are generally attacking his longest and strongest suit. Thus, he may have the luxury of getting rid of an obvious loser or setting up a side suit for discards. Also, your lead could help Declarer play the trump suit, picking off partner's honor cards.

Larry Cohen devotes just 3 pages to trump leads with the warning: "Bob Hamman, maybe the best player of all time, shies away from trump leads." Sally Brock's book, "Leading Questions in Bridge" uses 24 pages to cover the same topic with the caution: "When I was starting out in the game, I was warned away from leading trumps. To this day, I find it a hard thing to do." I conclude that beginners/intermediates should be wary of leading trumps, that these leads are best reserved for advanced/expert players.

Still, some auctions invite a trump lead. Cohen's metaphor (p.35) of GRAPE/ANYTHING/APPLE neatly defines the common auction of

1S	P	1NT	P
2H	P	P	P

Let's say you hold something like:

a) KJ1096, 73, Q4, A1043 or b) 72, J753, A98, KJ4

For situation a) You know that you are holding natural tricks in Declarer's primary suit; you know that he cannot establish the suit for discards; you know that Dummy is short in that suit and will ruff out your natural tricks; you know that Declarer holds at least 9 cards in the majors, is short in the minors, and may make extra tricks on a crossruff. Equally important, no other lead is remotely attractive.

For situation b) You can infer that Partner has long Spades; you know that a potential crossruff is easier than in a); you know that Partner is short in Trumps; you suspect that your minor suit honors may provide entries for repeated Trump leads. Any other lead may be worse.

Both Cohen and Brock advise against leading a trump from an honor, thus "finessing yourself". All experts warn against leading a singleton trump for fear of picking up partner's likely 4 card holding.

In my opinion, underleading the trump A (usually Axx) or K (Kxx) is generally safe. I go out of my way to lead the J from QJ doubleton and never hesitate to lead the singleton J. Granted, expert declarers are harder to fool, but they still have to play the cards in front of them and the odds.

As declarer, when I see a trump lead hit the table, I assume that opening leader holds most of the remaining high cards. and try to play the hand accordingly.

Bottom line: use your judgment; be prepared to change your strategy when you see Dummy. Most important, COUNT (likely distribution and missing HCPs) so that when you gain the lead you can make a logical play.

Brian