

### Defending against NT contracts

Usually when defending against NT contracts we begin the defence by leading the fourth best card of our 'longest and strongest' suit.

This is often the best lead. Sometimes, though, we need to lead a higher card in that suit.

However we need to be aware of other considerations:

What suit(s) have the opponents bid?

What suit(s) has partner bid?

How strong is the suit we are going to lead from?

How strong is our hand? And partners?

### If the declaring side have not bid a suit

Suppose the auction has gone

1NT - 3NT    or    1NT - 2NT - 3NT    or    2NT - 3NT

What do you lead?

Here it is usual to lead your longest/strongest suit.

What do you lead from:

♠ A 8 6  
♥ Q T 8 4 3  
♦ Q 7  
♣ 9 8 3

♠ K Q 2  
♥ K J 7 6 2  
♦ 9  
♣ Q 7 4 3

♥4 is best

♥6 is best

Generally lead 4<sup>th</sup> highest of your longest and strongest.

♠ 8 6 3  
♥ K Q J 4 3  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ J 3

♥K is best

If you have a sequence it is usually best to lead top of a sequence.

♠ 8 6 3  
♥ A J T 9 3  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ J 3

♥J is best

....or top of an interior sequence.

♠ 8 6 3  
♥ K Q 7 4 3  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ J 3

♥4 is best

If there are only two cards in the sequence then 4<sup>th</sup> highest is usually best.

♠ K Q 2  
♥ J T 9 7 6  
♦ T 9  
♣ 7 4 3

♥J is best

♠ K Q 2  
♥ A T 9 8 6  
♦ T 9  
♣ 7 4 3

♥T is best

♠ K Q 2  
♥ Q J 7 6 2  
♦ T 9  
♣ 7 4 3

♥6 is best

♠ 8 6 3  
♥ K Q T 4 3  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ J 3

♥K is best

If you have at least three top honours then usually a high one is best.

♠ Q 6 3  
♥ 8 6 4 3 2  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ J 3

♥6 is best

If you have a poor suit, with no honour, then second highest is usually best.

♠ 6 3  
♥ Q J 7 4 3  
♦ Q J 8 5 3  
♣ 3

♥4 is best

Prefer a major suit to a minor suit if you have two equal choices (because the opponents have not looked for a major fit so they are more likely to hold minors rather than majors).

♠ Q J 2  
♥ A J T 6 2  
♦ T 9  
♣ 7 4 3

♥J is best

♠ K Q 2  
♥ 9 7 6 4 2  
♦ T 9  
♣ K 4 3

♥7 is best

♠ K 6 2  
♥ K T 7 6  
♦ K 9  
♣ K T 8 5

♥6 is best

### What should partner play on the first trick?

Using the Rule of 11 partner will know how many cards higher than the lead declarer holds.

#### Rule of 11

If partner has led 4<sup>th</sup> highest then subtract the value of the card from 11. The result tells you how many cards there are higher than the lead in the three hands of yourself, dummy and declarer. Because you can see dummy and your own hand you know how many higher cards declarer has.

Eg

♠ Q 6 3 2  
♥ T 8 4  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ K Q 2  
(dummy)

♥7 (lead)

♠ 9 8 7 5 4  
(you) ♥ J 2  
♦ 6 5 4  
♣ A 4 3

Subtracting 7 from 11 makes 4. So you know there are four hearts out higher than the seven. Dummy has two (the eight and ten), you have one (the jack), so declarer has only one. No doubt it will beat your Jack, but once it is gone partner will have the rest of the heart suit.

The general rule for partner is 'third hand plays high'.

♥ T 8 4  
(dummy)

♥7 (lead)

(you) ♥ J 2

Here you should play the ♥J and either lead the suit straight back or lead it back when you get in.

♥ 9 8 4

(dummy)

♥3 (lead)

(you) ♥ Q T 2

Here you should play the ♥Q and either lead the ten straight back or lead it back when you get in.

♥ J 6 4

(dummy)

♥ 3(lead)

(you) ♥ Q T 2

Here you should play the ♥T (unless dummy plays the Jack) and either lead the Queen straight back or lead it back when you get in.

♥ 9 8 4

(dummy)

♥3 (lead)

(you) ♥ Q J 2

Here you should play the ♥J (play high, but the lowest of touching honours) and either lead the Queen straight back or lead it back when you get in.

♥ K 4

(dummy)

♥2 (lead)

(you) ♥ A Q 3

Here you should play the ♥Q (unless dummy plays the King, when you will play your Ace), lead your other high card and then finally lead the three back to partner.

#### What if the opponents have bid a suit or suits, but play in NT

Generally you do not want to lead a suit against NT that has been bid by the opponents.

Certainly you do not want to lead declarer's suit, into his hand. Usually you do not want to lead dummy's suit, although at least the lead here is through the dummy so may work.

There are always exceptions and you should lead declarer's suit if you are very strong in it.

Declarer has bid hearts

♠ Q 6 3 2

♥ K 6 4 3 2

♦ K Q 7

♣ J

♠ K Q 3 2

♥ K J 7 6 4

♦ T 9

♣ K 4

It is almost certainly not a good idea to lead a heart into declarer's hand. The fourth highest spade is probably best in both cases.

Declarer has bid hearts

♠ 9 6 3 2

♥ K Q J T 2

♦ A 7

♣ 3 2

♠ K 3 2

♥ Q J T 9 6 4

♦ 5 4 2

♣ 7

Here your hearts are very strong and it is almost certainly best to lead your top heart.

#### What if partner has bid a suit?

If partner has bid a suit it is usually best to lead that suit. However, if you are very short in that suit, or have a strong suit of your own, then you might decide otherwise. Also remember that declarer is prepared to play in NT despite partner's bid and so is likely to hold stops behind partner.

Partner has bid hearts

♠ Q 9 6 3 2

♥ 6 2

♦ K Q 7

♣ J 4 3

♠ K Q 3 2

♥ J 4

♦ T 9 7 3

♣ J 4 2

♥6 is best

♥J is best

In both cases your suit is not as good as partner's and you should lead his suit.

Partner has bid hearts

♠ Q 9 6 3

♥ 2

♦ Q 7 4 2

♣ T 4 3 2

♠ K Q 3 2

♥ 4

♦ J T 9 7 3

♣ J

There is no easy answer here. In the first case partner may have entries and be a bit stronger and so it might be best to lead ♥ 2. In the second case partner looks a bit weaker and you might be better to lead one of your own suits. But then you have the choice of ♠ 2 or ♦ J.

Partner has bid hearts

♠ K Q J 9 6

♥ 2

♦ A 7 4 2

♣ T 3 2

♠ 6 2

♥ 8 6 3

♦ K Q J T 3

♣ A

♠ K is best

♦ K is best

In both these cases you can almost certainly get a contract of 3NT off yourself by ignoring partner's bid and leading your own suit.