

Active and Passive leads

Recap

A passive lead has little or no risk attached to it. It means playing safe and waiting for declarer to go wrong.

An active lead is more risky. It involves trying to make or establish tricks and taking some risks to do so.

Generally it is best, at pairs, to play a passive defence. Try not to give anything away.

When should you be passive in defence?

Usually

If opponents have stumbled into game

Against a trump contract, if declarer does not have a long suit

Against a Grand Slam

Against 6NT

When should you be active in defence?

Perhaps if opponents have bid game very confidently

When the declarer is trying to set up a long suit

When there is a long suit in dummy or declarer's hand

Against a pre-empt

Against a small slam in a suit contract

Try not to open up a new suit.

Remember that Aces are there to capture Kings.

Eg consider this suit layout.

K T 4
(dummy)

A 6 5
(you)

J 9 8 2
(partner)

Q 7 3
(declarer)

From your point of view this is a frozen suit. If partner leads the suit, then declarer will play small, and you either have to go up with the Ace, or let dummy win a trick with the ten. Either way, declarer will win two tricks in the suit.

If you lead the suit, by leading the Ace it will "beat air" and declarer will win two tricks with the King and Queen. If you lead small then declarer can let the lead come round to his Queen and then lead later towards the King to make a second trick in the suit.

If declarer is left to his own devices, he should only take one trick in the suit. If he leads low from dummy towards the Queen, you can win the Queen with the Ace, and partner's Jack will ensure declarer only wins one trick in the suit.

If declarer leads low from hand, you MUST NOT go up with the Ace, (remember the old whist rule - second hand plays low), and then your Ace will eventually beat declarer's Queen.

Suppose you are West and you have heard this bidding:

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|----------|
| 1♦ | Pass | 1♥ | Pass |
| 3♥ | Pass | 4♥ | All Pass |

Your hand is:

♠ A Q T 7 5
♥ A T 6
♦ 9 8 6 5
♣ 6

What should you lead?

In general, it pays to be passive, and probably a diamond would have been best.

However, North has bid this suit and you may be helping to set it up for declarer. A spade lead is very dangerous, and a heart may kill a second trick for your side if partner has an honour. Probably the singleton club is best. At least you can win the first trump trick and try and put partner in to give you a ruff. Dummy goes down and this is what you can see:

| | |
|-------------|---------|
| ♠ J | |
| ♥ Q J 8 5 | |
| ♦ A Q J T 4 | |
| ♣ K Q 2 | (dummy) |
| ♠ A Q T 7 5 | |
| ♥ A T 6 | |
| ♦ 9 8 6 5 | |
| ♣ 6 | |

On the first trick, declarer plays the Queen from dummy and partner follows with the three. Declarer plays the five of hearts from dummy, partner follows with the four, and you win declarer's King with your Ace. What do you play now?

It seems like a diamond is best, hoping that declarer will take the finesse and allow partner to win. Partner can then give us a spade ruff, and we can cash the Ace of spades for the setting trick.

However, when you lead a diamond, declarer hops up with the Ace and draws trumps. Yes, partner wins a trick with the King of diamonds, and declarer has to lose a spade, but declarer makes his contract.

What if you lead the Ace of spades instead? That is no good because it does not get partner in to give you a ruff.

We have learned to NEVER, EVER UNDERLEAD AN ACE against a suit contract. Well.....circumstances alter cases!!

Here you must lead the five of spades in the hope that partner has the King. If he has he will win it and give you a club ruff. Then eventually partner will win the King of diamonds to set the contract by one trick.

The full hand:

| | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ♠ J | | |
| ♥ Q J 8 5 | | |
| ♦ A Q J T 4 | | |
| ♣ K Q 2 | | |
| (dummy) | | |
| ♠ A Q T 7 5 | | ♠ K 9 6 3 2 |
| ♥ A T 6 | | ♥ 7 4 |
| ♦ 9 8 6 5 | | ♦ K 7 |
| ♣ 6 | | ♣ T 8 4 3 |
| | ♠ 8 4 | |
| | ♥ K 9 3 2 | |
| | ♦ 3 2 | |
| | ♠ A J 9 7 5 | |

This is more of a teams/rubber bridge defence as the spade underlead may concede an overtrick....but it's the only defence that can defeat the game!