**OPENING LEADS**

Choosing your opening lead is one of the most difficult challenges you face in bridge because you have little information to help you.

Very often the success of declarer is dependent on what you choose.

The opening lead can have 3 results:

**Neutral** - where you do not help the defence or declarer.

**Successful** - where you either take your winners straight away or set up winners before declarer can discard their losers.

**Unsuccessful** - where you give away a trick or help declarer find the best line of play.

On a given hand almost any card could turn out to be neutral, successful or unsuccessful, and you have to accept that you will not get it right every time.  The best that you can hope for is that you will get it right more often than not.

How do you choose the opening lead to give yourself the best chance of avoiding an unsuccessful lead?

What information do you have to help you decide?  Obviously, you have your own hand and some leads look safe i.e. if you have AK of a suit it generally will be fairly safe to lead the Ace (or King) and have a look at dummy. If it is a suit contract then a singleton can be an attacking lead, hoping to be able to trump one of declarer's winners.

What if you don't have an obvious lead?  What other information do you have?  The bidding can be really helpful.  If partner has bid then leading partner's suit is likely to be at least a safe lead and may make sure that you take the tricks in that suit before they disappear. **A good rule is to always lead partner’s suit – if partner has bid a suit they don’t want lead then it will be their fault!**

If partner has not bid then you have to listen carefully to the opponent's bidding.  The first thing to do is to try to work out how many points the opponents have between them.  If they have bid to game there is a good chance they have at least 25 points between them.  So if you add your points to 25 and take the total from 40, you will have an estimate of how many points your partner has.  Say you have 4 or 5 points, there is a good chance that partner has 9 or 10 points so if you lead 4th highest from say Qxxx then there is a good chance that partner will have a honour and it will be safe lead.  If you have 10 points yourself then partner will only have 4 or 5 and the chance of finding partner with an honour in that suit is much less.  It may be safer to make a passive lead from 3 or 4 small.

If the opponents have stopped in a part score they probably only have 22 or 23 points and so partner is likely to have more honour cards. Leading away from an honour will be safer.  If the contract is a slam then it is usually best to lead an Ace if you have got one and if not, make a passive lead.

The opponents' bidding can give you some good clues. If they have bid 3 suits but finish in 3NTs then lead the unbid suit.  If they play in declarer's second suit then leading their first suit is a risk as it may set the suit up before you can win tricks in other suits. If you don't have an obvious lead then leading through Dummy's suit may set up a trick for partner.

Sometimes declarer wants to trump losers in dummy and leading a trump may limit how many losers can be trumped.  This is most effective if dummy has only 2 or 3 trumps e.g. the opposition sequence:

1S - 2D

3S - 4S

indicates that dummy only has a few trumps and may be short in one of the other suits.  Conversely, if the opposition are playing 4 card majors then the sequence:

1S - 2S

4S

shows that dummy has 4 trumps and leading a trump is unlikely to help to stop any trumping.

If you still are unsure what to lead then the top of a sequence like QJ10, or J109 is usually fairly safe.

One lead to avoid is to underlead any honour if declarer has opened with a very strong bid and is almost sure to have honours in the suit you lead.

In notrump contracts it is often good to underlead an Ace. **It is almost always a bad idea to underlead an Ace against a suit contract**.  If you want to lead a suit with an Ace in it against a suit contract then lead the Ace.

Many members may have been advised to lead 4th highest in their longest suit. It can be a good lead against No Trumps but you always need to take account of the bidding and as a partnership understand the ‘Rule of 11’. For those of you who don’t really understand the ‘rule of 11’ it works like this:

The person on lead has 3 cards higher than the card led. Above the 10 there are 4 cards so the Ace is really a ‘14’. If you take 3 from 14 you get 11. If you take the card lead – say the 6 – then there are 5 (11 – 6) above the 6 in the hands of Dummy, Declarer and you. You can see Dummy and your own hand so you can work out how many cards higher than 6 that Declarer has. This will help you sometimes to know which of your cards to play. For this to work you need to work out if partner has really lead 4th highest. This why you need to have a clear understanding what partner will lead from 3 small and 2 small. Generally small cards are 4th highest and cards like the 8 are from something like 9,8,4 or 8,5. The 2 is always 4th highest or a singleton!