THE CARD TO LEAD FROM SHORT SUITS

First choose the suit to lead. This decision is covered in Chapters 3 and 4. After selecting the suit, you must play the correct card in the suit. No matter which system of leads you adopt, there is little scope for deviation from the correct systemic card. One function of the lead is to inform partner about your holding in the suit. To deviate will mislead partner. ‘Short suit leads’ refers to leads from doubletons or tripletons.

The Honour Cards are the A, K, Q, J and 10. Lower cards are called ‘spot cards’, ‘pips’ or “rags”.

DOUBLETONS

Lead the top card. The card to lead is underlined:

\[ \underline{A} - 5 \quad \underline{K} - J \quad \underline{Q} - 7 \quad 8 - 3 \quad 3 - 2 \]

THREE-CARD SUITS

Rule 1: With an honour and the card immediately below it, lead TOP of the touching cards:

\[ K - Q - x \quad Q - J - x \quad J - 10 - x \quad 10 - 9 - x \]

K - J - 10  |  K - 10 - 9  |  Q - 10 - 9  |  A - K - x

NOTE: From A-K-x, the ace is recommended, but the king is led by some pairs.

Rule 2: With one or two honours and no touching cards, lead the BOTTOM card. For example:

\[ K - 8 - 2 \quad Q - 10 - 4 \quad J - 9 - 5 \quad 10 - 6 - 2 \]

NOTE: The 10, an honour, follows Rules 1 and 2.

EXCEPTION: From A-x-x, lead the ace in a suit contract, but bottom card at no-trumps.

Rule 3: With no honour, lead the MIDDLE card. Next round, play top of the remaining doubleton.

\[ 9 - 6 - 2 \ : \ Lead \ the \ 6, \ play \ the \ 9 \ on \ the \ next \ round. \]

\[ 4 - 3 - 2 \ : \ Lead \ the \ 3, \ play \ the \ 4 \ on \ the \ next \ round. \]

\[ 8 - 7 - 6 \ : \ Lead \ the \ 7, \ play \ the \ 8 \ on \ the \ next \ round. \] For top of sequence, the sequence must contain an honour.

\[ 8 - 4 - 3 \ : \ Lead \ the \ 4, \ play \ the \ 8 \ on \ the \ next \ round. \]

This method, known as Middle-Up-Down or M.U.D. is the most popular method of leading from three cards with no honour card.

Variation: Some partnerships prefer bottom from any three cards, including three rags. Check with partner before adopting this approach.

Variation: Top-of-nothing is now a discredited method of leading from rag holdings since partner is unable to distinguish doubletons from 3-card or longer holdings. However, if your bidding has shown length in a suit (e.g. you raised partner’s suit, thus promising 3-card or 4-card support), you may lead top from three or four rags. Since partner will not be misled about suit length (you cannot hold a shortage), the top card lead will deny any honour in the suit.

WHY LEAD TOP FROM DOUBLETONS?

(1) Honour Doubleton

The top card is led from holdings like A-x, K-x, Q-x, J-x and 10-x to unblock the suit and to enable partner to take as many tricks as possible in the suit.

\[ A \ 6 \ K \ Q \ J \ 5 \ 3 \]

\[ 10 \ 9 \ 4 \]

West leads the ace and East can cash as many tricks as are available. If West leads low, the defence takes only two quick tricks in the suit. (NOTE: If East is on lead and leads the king, West must unblock the ace. Overtake the king with the ace and return the 6. Then East-West collect all their tricks. If East leads the king and West plays low, the defence can take only two quick tricks.)

\[ K \ 6 \ 10 \ 9 \ 5 \ 2 \]

\[ A \ J \ 4 \ 3 \ 8 \ 7 \]

If West leads the king and then low, East-West can take five tricks in no-trumps. If West leads low, the defence cannot take five tricks at once. In a suit contract, if West leads the king and then low to East, West is in a position to overruff South on the third round. If West leads low to East’s ace and wins the second round, West is not in a position to score an overruff.

\[ Q \ 6 \ A \ 10 \ 4 \ K \ J \ 9 \ 5 \ 3 \]

If West leads the queen and continues, East’s suit is set up whether South wins the ace at once or later. If West leads low first, South can block the East-West suit by winning the ace on the first round or by ducking the second round to West’s queen.