

# DEFENSE SERIES

## LESSON 1

### Opening Leads--Technical Basics

People have asked me which aspect of the game is most important for elevating your game fairly quickly. Is it bidding, declarer play or defense? My vote is for defense, which is also the toughest to master. Most players have access to the same resources in learning how to bid a hand. A few hands over the course of an evening might require some delicate bidding judgement, but on the majority, using those tools will get you to the optimum contract. On the declarer play front, you have the luxury of seeing both yours and partner's hand before you play to the first trick. Also, the opening lead will have given you some information. Knowing how many tricks you need to win or can afford to lose, plus some knowledge of the mathematical probabilities will give you a decent chance of fulfilling the objective if you're in the right contract.

When you're defending a hand, the only cards you see before the start of the hand are the thirteen that you have. When dummy hits after you've chosen your lead, you'll see another hand, but unlike declarer will not know exactly what your partner will have. Consequently, you'll have to both send accurate messages through the cards you play and also be able to interpret what partner is trying to tell you through what he contributes on each trick during the hand.

For about 3-4 years after I started to play bridge, I had my moments but didn't achieve a real consistency in my results. At that point, I decided that since I was apt to be on defense on half of the boards over a normal session, that was where I ought to be directing a substantial portion of my energies. Once I did that, I was able to take a significant leap forward in the quality of my game.

There have been many books written on both defense and opening leads that I've drawn upon for the course material and can suggest for additional reading. They are:

<i>Defensive Bridge Play Complete</i>	--	Edwin B. Kantar
<i>How to Defend a Bridge Hand</i>	--	William S. Root
<i>Defensive Play at Bridge-A Quizbook</i>	--	Barbara Seagram
<i>Defensive Carding and Opening Leads</i>	--	Patty Tucker
<i>Cheatsheet and Pocket Guide to Defense</i>	--	Barbara Seagram
<i>The Complete Book of Opening Leads</i>	--	Robert Ewen
<i>Opening Leads</i>	--	Mike Lawrence

The opening lead is the cornerstone of defending effectively. While it remains an ongoing process even after the first card is played, the lead can either substantially increase or reduce your chances of defeating their contract.

There are three separate aspects that make up a good opening lead. Each of them will be dealt with in the first three lessons. The first is to play a card that sends a useful message to your partner. The second is to be conscious of what your objective is going to be, against both suit and notrump contracts. The last and perhaps the most crucial is to use the information from the opponents' auction to help guide you in your final decision.

On some hands, you can afford to lead an honor card, while on others you should be starting out with a low one. How can you know for sure whether you should be going big or small on the opening lead?

## SEQUENCES

A sequence consists of at least two cards that are touching in rank, including one or more honor cards. They come in four varieties:

**Perfect sequence--** Three touching cards. These will be very attractive choices for an opening lead, as you can either take or quickly promote tricks even if partner has little or no help. Here are some illustrations, showing just the top cards since the leader might have other small ones to go with them:

AKQ            KQJ            QJ10            J109

When you have a sequence to lead from, play the higher of your touching cards. While it may not matter to you which card you play, remember that partner does not have the gift of x-ray vision. If, for example, you lead the 10 from QJ10, he might well assume that's your highest card, and will be mystified when you turn out to have the Queen and Jack as well. However, if you lead the Queen, he'll know you'll also have the Jack and possibly the 10 as well.

**Broken sequence--** In this case, you'll have two touching cards and the next highest one after that. Below are some typical broken-sequence holdings:

AKJ            KQ10            QJ9            J108

Again, there is enough strength in these layouts for you to be leading the top card, as it could be very productive and there is little risk involved.

**Interior sequence--** This variation is the opposite of the broken sequence, in that it consists of top card that is not supported and two touching honors below it. To get a better idea of the concept, we'll look at:

KJ10            K109            Q109  
AQJ            AJ10            A109

The principle with the interior sequence is to lead the top of your adjoining honors, not the very highest card.

You'll notice I have the examples on two lines, and that's because it's fine to lead from the interior sequences headed by the King or Queen against either a suit or notrump contract. From the holdings that contain the Ace, you can adopt a similar policy against notrump contracts **only**. If they are playing in a suit contract, it's not a good idea to underlead the Ace and you should probably avoid leading the suit at all.

**Two-card sequences--** Here you'll still have two adjacent cards, but nothing much of consequence below them. They are nice to have, and you'll often consider leading from those suits, but there are fewer guarantees of producing tricks. Here are a few to peruse:

AKx(x..) KQx(x..) QJx(x..) J10x(x..) 109x(x..)

### **Guidelines for When to Lead from Sequences**

Against suit contracts, regardless of length, leading from the perfect, broken and two-card sequences is worth a thought. So is leading from the interior sequences if they are headed by the King or Queen. The primary exceptions are interior sequences headed by the Ace, as either leading or underleading that card may prove to be quite costly. In those cases, you're better off looking for another suit to start out with.

Against notrump contracts, assuming you have at least four cards in the suit, you'll have decent chances of success leading from the perfect and broken sequences. The same applies to the interior sequences, even the ones including the Ace as you will get that card later on in the vast majority of the hands.

From two-card sequences, the best policy is to lead a small card rather than the honor against notrump. You'll need some help from partner for the lead to be effective, and if he has it, you'd rather put him in a situation where he has to play the high card right away.

To illustrate it's a better course to follow, let's consider the holding below in the West chair. You have nothing much in the way of high cards outside of your long suit.

H-- AK764

If the opponents are in a 4S contract, it's an obvious lead of the heart Ace, whereupon you may get the first two tricks or, on a good day, the AK of hearts and a ruff by partner on the third round of the suit.

Now let's say the auction has gone:

<b>RHO</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	3NT

To be sure, you can take your two heart winners right off the hop, but will you be getting anything besides that? Here are two layouts where the answer would be no:

	852		J95
AK764	93	AK764	Q3
	QJ10		1082

With the way the cards on the left are sitting, partner has no help but will return your suit if he gets in, so you can take four heart tricks by leading a small card from your two-card sequence. The Ace, on the other hand, restricts the number of tricks you can win to two, as there won't be any communication between the two hands after the top hearts are played.

It gets worse in the example on the right, where a low heart would have resulted in five quick winners for the defense. But if the Ace of hearts is played instead, the suit is blocked. East can win the second trick with the Queen, but the suit is blocked as he has no more to return. And if West plays the King of hearts on the next round, his partner's honor crashes and declarer now miraculously has a stopper in a suit he was missing the top three cards.

## WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A SEQUENCE

Alas, the card gods sometimes aren't so obliging as to deal you a perfect or even a two-card sequence. A fair number of times, your long suit will consist of holdings such as:

Q9652	K8752	Q1064	J985	KJ962
-------	-------	-------	------	-------

These can still be worthwhile suits to lead. That said, you can't afford to lead an honor as you really don't have much of an idea about where the length and strength is in the other three hands. From these holdings, bridge teachers and authors suggest leading one of the small cards. You're still trying to do something constructive, as you might be able to build some immediate tricks once the first round has been played, and if they're in a notrump contract, you could be well on your way to establishing long-suit winners for your side.

Let's survey five holdings in the diamond suit and choose which of them has the most potential. Assume that they're in 3NT.

K643	K7643	K1084	KJ97	KJ965
------	-------	-------	------	-------

If you lead from the quartet of cards on the left, you'll be holding your breath. It could be good for your side, but very much hinges on what partner has. With the second holding, at least you have a fifth card and a potential extra trick. The middle of the pack has a useful spot card with the 10, and that could help establish tricks if partner has as little as the Jack. Our fourth exhibit is better yet, as you'll be quite happy if partner has the Ace or Queen of your suit. And on the far right, you have the extra length to go with your honors.

The recommended lead when you have a long suit is the fourth-best card. It may not seem particularly relevant whether you start out with that or the lowest card in the suit, but it enables partner to apply a useful tool when playing to the first trick and deciding whether to continue the suit or look elsewhere for tricks. More on that in a subsequent chapter.

Are there any exceptions to the "lead fourth best from longest and strongest" guideline? There is one for sure, and arguably a second.

- You can underlead the Ace of a long suit against notrump, but not against a suit contract.

Suppose you're in possession of the A10765 of hearts. If the contract is 3NT and the suit hasn't been bid, you should toss the 6 out, because some honors might appear on the first trick and you'll be well placed to take tricks later on in the hand. But if they're in 4S instead, there might be a singleton heart lurking in either declarer's hand or dummy, so it would not be advisable to lead a small card.

- From a poor four-card suit, there is a contingent of players that will lead highest or second-highest.

To illustrate, let's say the auction has gone 1NT-3NT and you're on lead with:

S-- 9865      H-- Q7      D-- A643      C-- K105

Hearts and clubs aren't really options, so that leaves a spade or a diamond. Some would go ahead and lead a diamond, but others might lead a spade because responder has denied major-suit length, not having used the Stayman convention. A spade could be the right way to go, but the glitch is that partner may return the suit expecting more in the way of high-card strength. A way to let him know that you have some length but an unremarkable suit is to lead a high spot card rather than a low one. Since partner is familiar with the fourth-highest axiom, he should be able to clue in on what you have in the suit because of your abnormally high card.

This leads us into an acronym that Barbara Seagram and other bridge teachers use, namely "BOSTON". That means "Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing". That can be helpful advice, but sometimes gets misinterpreted, most notably when people lead small from perfect or interior sequences rather than an honor card. So a bit of clarification is in order. Bottom of something refers to broken holdings rather than sequences. Top of nothing arises mainly in leading from four small and also when playing up to dummy's weakness later on in the hand.

**Board 1**

South dealer

**North**

S-- K32  
 H-- A8  
 D-- 8654  
 C-- QJ72

**West**

S-- 10974  
 H--106542  
 D-- A3  
 C--K3

**East**

S-- J86  
 H-- 973  
 D--J109  
 C-- A854

**South**

S-- AQ5  
 H--KQJ  
 D-- KQ72  
 C-- 1096

**Auction:**

North	East	South	West
		1NT	pass
3NT	pass	pass	pass

With 10 HCP, responder has enough to raise to game after partner's 1NT opening.

**The Play:**

Declarer has six major suit tricks, and the club and diamond suits offers chances for developing the three additional winners he needs. He'll start by driving out the Ace and King of clubs to "make" two tricks there, and then establish a diamond trick.

West's hearts seem pretty nondescript, but a lead of a small card from the five-card suit will defeat the contract. As long as the defense keeps playing the suit throughout the hand, they'll eventually create two heart tricks to go with their two club winners and the Ace of diamonds.

Long suits are fertile ground to develop tricks of our own when the opponents are in a notrump contract.

## Board 2

East dealer

**North**

S-- A943

H-- K65

D-- AKJ7

C-- J9

**West**

S-- K8

H-- AQ109

D-- 843

C-- KQ108

**East**

S-- 105

H-- J8742

D-- Q106

C-- A62

**South**

S-- QJ762

H-- 3

D-- 952

C-- 7543

### Auction:

North	East	South	West
	pass	pass	1C
dbl	1H	pass	2H
dbl	pass	2S	3H
pass	pass	pass	

North's double has no effect on responder, who is still able to bid 1H. After opener raises, North with his 16 HCP doubles again. It's still for takeout, and South is being asked to choose between the unbid suits. He duly bids 2S, and E-W then compete to 3H.

### The Play:

Whether the contract succeeds or fails depends upon the opening lead. South's best and longest suit is spades, so that figures to be the best choice. In a suit contract, you can begin with the honor from a two-card sequence, so South leads the Queen. Dummy's King is trapped and the defenders will take two spades, the Ace and King of diamonds, and an eventual trump trick with the King.

Without a top spade out of the chute, declarer can eventually ditch his second card in the suit on the long club after trumps are drawn, because South will never regain the lead.

### Board 3

North dealer

		North		
		S-- KQ643		
		H-- Q1087		
		D-- A3		
		C-- Q2		
West			East	
S-- 52			S-- AJ10	
H-- A432			H-- 965	
D-- Q106			D-- K9754	
C-- 9743			C-- 85	
		South		
		S--987		
		H--KJ		
		D--J82		
		C--AKJ106		

### Auction:

North	East	South	West
1S	pass	2C	pass
2H	pass	4S	pass
pass	pass		

To show a game-going hand with support and a good suit of his own, responder bids 2C and then jumps to game in opener's major.

### The Play:

Once again, the opening lead is pivotal to the result of the hand. East has two probable trump winners, but where can the defense find other tricks? His other card is in diamonds, and the opponents have bid every suit but that one. That might be a productive lead, then, and since he doesn't have an honor sequence he leads the 5, his fourth-best card.

If declarer has enough time, he play two rounds of trumps and rattle off his club winners to shed the losing diamond. But a diamond lead will produce a fourth trick for the defense along with their heart Ace and two spades.



## Board 4

West Dealer

		North		
		S--KJ106		
		H-- J742		
		D--1065		
West		C--85	East	
S--984			S--Q32	
H--K98			H--Q106	
D-- QJ4			D--AK932	
C-- AKQ7		South	C-- J4	
		S--A75		
		H-- A53		
		D-- 87		
		C-- 109532		

### Auction:

North	East	South	West
			1NT
pass	3NT	pass	pass
pass			

With 12 HCP and a good five-card suit, responder knows his side has the values for game and rockets into 3NT.

### The Play:

North has two four-card suits to choose from as his lead, but the spades are much stronger and that looks to be the way to go.

If you remember from earlier in the lesson, the KJ10 is an **interior** sequence. From these holdings, you'd lead not the top card, but the higher of the touching honors, in this case the Jack.

Even when the Jack is led, South must let it ride if declarer plays low. While he can't be sure who has the missing honor, playing the Ace immediately would allow the Queen to score, so he should hold that card back for later.

No matter what West does, the defenders will take four spades and the Ace of hearts for down one.

## Hand 5

West dealer

		North		
		S-- AQ		
		H-- 732		
		D-- AQ92		
		C-- AJ96		
West			East	
S--K8			S-- J10753	
H-- AK5			H-- J96	
D-- J854			D-- 76	
C-- 8432			C-- KQ10	
		South		
		S-- 9642		
		H-- Q1084		
		D-- K103		
		C-- 75		

## Auction

North	East	South	West
			pass
1NT	pass	pass	pass

North opens 1NT in second seat and gets to play it there, as West has 11 HCP but too balanced a hand to compete.

## The Play

With only a two-card sequence, East leads the 5 of spades, fourth-best from his long suit.

West plays the King and declarer wins the trick with the Ace. He can play the top diamonds off at any time, but elects to try and develop tricks in the heart suit while there is an entry on dummy. North plays a low heart to the 10 and King, whereupon a second spade comes back. Hoping that opening leader has the remaining high heart, North plays another round of the suit without success, as East's 9 forces the Queen and Ace. Now West switches to a club, dummy's weakness, and East gets in either now or later to run his spades from the top.

If East had begun with the Jack of spades, dummy's 9 would have become a third stopper and prevented the defenders from running the suit.

## Hand 6

East dealer

		North		
		S-- Q43		
		H-- Q75		
		D-- AK65		
		C-- 752		
West		South	East	
S-- KJ10			S-- A9865	
H-- AJ32			H-- K94	
D-- Q87			D-- 94	
C-- K63			C-- AQ10	
		S-- 72		
		H-- 1086		
		D-- J1032		
		C-- J984		

## Auction

North	East	South	West
	1S	pass	2C
pass	3C	pass	4S
pass	pass	pass	

West's 2C response may seem peculiar, but a 2/1 response in a major suit promises five of them, and the Jacoby 2NT raise should contain four-card support rather than just three. So responder creates a forcing situation by bidding a minor suit at the two-level, which leaves the door open for a heart contract if partner has four of them.

Opener could rebid 2NT, but it seems more descriptive to raise clubs with the good three-card support. West then jumps to game in partner's major, ending the bidding.

## The Play

While you should have at least a broken sequence to lead an honor against a notrump contract, when you're defending against a suit, leading the top of a two-card sequence is perfectly all right.

Why the distinction? When you're leading against notrump, you hope to get eventual tricks in your long suit, so you'd like partner to contribute a high card if he has one early in the play. If the opponents are in a suit contract, you won't often get length tricks, so the objective is to take whatever quick tricks you're entitled to, usually with honor cards.

If South begins with the Jack of diamonds, the Queen is trapped and N-S can play three rounds of the suit, forcing declarer to ruff. As the cards lie, there is no way to avoid a heart loser and East must guess which of you has the Queen of trump.

On a small diamond lead, North might well take the Ace and King, as he is not 100% certain of who holds the Jack. That would allow declarer to pitch his third heart on the Queen of diamonds, and now ten tricks are assured regardless of how he plays the trump suit.

### Hand 7

South dealer

**North**

S-- Q92  
H-- Q8  
D-- KQJ6  
C-- Q962

**West**

S-- A85  
H-- J10632  
D-- 954  
C-- J3

**East**

S-- 743  
H-- K74  
D-- 1083  
C-- K1085

**South**

S-- KJ106  
H-- A95  
D-- A72  
C-- A74

### Auction:

North	East	South	West
		1NT	pass
3NT	pass	pass	pass

The auction is fairly routine, with South opening a strong notrump and responder leaping to game with 12 HCP and no four-card major.

### The Play:

West's long suit is hearts but once again he has just a two-card sequence, so he leads the 3 rather than the Jack.

If declarer knows the actual layout of the suit, he would play the eight from table. But most times, all that will do is fetch the 10 or Jack from East, and he will only have the one stopper. So in reality, he is going to put up the Queen in the hope that opening leader has the King of the suit. East plays the King and now South has to duck the Ace twice, win the third round of spades and drive out the Ace of spades, hoping that his RHO has that card. Alas, West takes the trick and two more hearts to defeat the contract a trick.

If West had led the Jack of hearts, declarer would have been much happier as he covers with the Queen and because of the 9 and 8 in the two hands, he would have had a second winner in the suit.

### Hand 8

East dealer

**North**

S-- J762

H-- J843

D-- J9

C-- 542

**West**

S-- AQ3

H-- K107

D-- 10864

C-- J86

**East**

S-- K94

H-- AQ6

D-- A53

C-- K1097

**South**

S-- 1085

H-- 952

D-- KQ72

C-- AQ3

### Auction:

North	East	South	West
	1NT	pass	3NT
pass	pass	pass	

Nothing fancy in the bidding here, your standard 1NT-3NT auction.

### The Play

Partner can't have a lot, so South has nothing better to do than lead a diamond. With only a two-card sequence, the choice should be fourth-best rather than one of the honor cards. This is especially true of an auction where the opponents haven't used Stayman to look for a major-suit fit and partner could well be short in your minor.

In fact, South has led a suit where the opponents have more cards than his side does. However, it's still the only way to beat the contract. If East plays low from dummy, partner inserts the nine, since it's an equal card to the Jack with the 10 visible on table. Even if declarer refuses the first two diamonds, South will eventually get in with the Ace and Queen of clubs to promote his fourth diamond as the setting trick.

If the lead was a high diamond, dummy's 10 becomes a second stopper and declarer will successfully go after clubs for the extra tricks he needs.