

THERE are plenty of clever-clog bridge players who, on seeing partner fail in a contract, can triumphantly proclaim that if he had tackled a crucial suit in a different way he would have increased his chance of success from 57.3% to 58.5%. This is not practical bridge!

There are thousands of possible suit combinations, many of which can be tackled in more than one way depending on the context of the suit within the whole hand. A few combinations are common and are worth knowing; for many of the others it would be a Herculean and pointless feat to memorise how to play them.

The purpose of this new series of articles is to help you reason correctly. I am interested in helping your thought processes as you tackle a key suit. For all combinations in this article assume you have plenty of entries to either hand unless you are told otherwise.

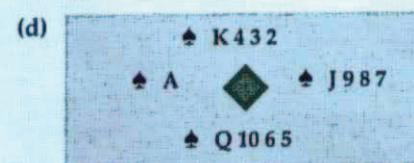
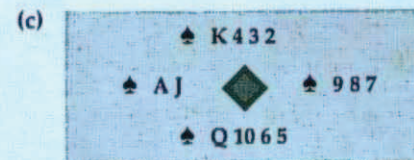
Two important principles are demonstrated in (a):



You can often arrive at the correct conclusion by mentally increasing the value of all your honours by one (or more) place. If you do that here you get (b):



This is a well known position and is governed by the commonly quoted guideline: 'Eight ever, nine never'. With eight cards in the suit and the queen missing the suit is to cash the ace and then finesse the jack. Reverting to (a), you should cash the king and finesse the ten, but that is qualified by a second principle. It is generally right to lead up to honours rather than lead out the honour. Hence you should first lead from the South hand towards North's king. That holds your losers to one if the suit breaks 3-2 with East holding the ♠, or if the suit layout is (c) or (d).



The same principles apply in layout (e). Mentally upgrade all your honours by one and you get (a). The same technique applies. Lead from the South hand towards North's ♠Q. If that loses make the second lead from North and if East plays low insert your ♠9.



## Andrew Kambites

### A new series to help you improve your card play



The principle of leading up to honours has widespread applications. How would you play (f), (g) and (h) to get maximum tricks in a no-trump contract?



Clearly your best chance in (f) is finding the suit 3-3. You should consider how you might succeed on a less favourable break, but your overriding consideration should be that you must do nothing that would jeopardise your best chance.

Suppose you lead from South towards the ♥J. You will succeed if West has the ♥A singleton, but if he has ♥Ax you will make only two tricks because you cannot afford to duck the second round.

Better play is to start by leading from North. If your ♥K wins return to the North and lead towards South's remaining honour. If that also wins play the third round. You will make three tricks on any 3-3 break or if East has the ♥A singleton or doubleton.



In (g) you should start by leading a low card from North towards your ♦Q. If that wins return to the North hand and again lead small towards your ♦J. If that wins without the ♦K appearing cash the ♦A

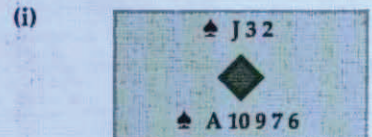
and hope for a 3-3 break. You make four tricks if East started with the ♦K tripleton, doubleton or singleton.

In (h) you have just won the opening lead in the South hand and must play the club suit for six tricks. Clearly your main chance is to find the suit breaking 3-2 but you should also consider whether you might succeed on any 4-1 breaks.



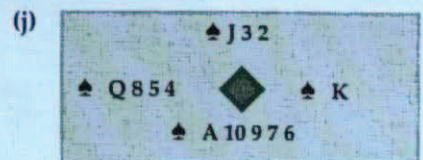
You won't succeed often if clubs break 4-1, but you can cope if East has the singleton ♣A provided you are careful. It costs nothing to enter the North hand and lead a club. It gains spectacularly if East has the ♣A singleton.

The spade suit in (i) occurred in a recent schools' simultaneous pairs competition.



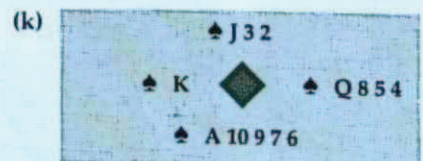
Firstly identify your main chance of making four tricks: spades breaking 3-2 with at least one honour in the West hand. Can you improve on that?

As a general principle it is best to lead towards an honour rather than lead the honour, hence you should lead a low card from the North hand towards South. Those who started with the ♠J found they had a second spade loser when the layout turned out to be:



Suppose the layout is different. You overcome the first hurdle and correctly lead the ♠2 towards the ♠10, losing to West's ♠K. What next?

You need to be able to cope with layout (k) without jeopardising your main chance.



You should re-enter North and this time lead the ♠J! East must cover (otherwise you have no problem), you win the ♠A and now you have a marked finesse against East's ♠8. Of course a low spade towards your ♠7 would deliver the goods on the above layout, but you would feel very foolish if you lost a second trick to West's doubleton ♠K8. The overriding principle is always to try to give yourself extra chances without jeopardising your main chance.