

Opening Leads



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by Derek Patterson

Cutting Down the Ruffs

IN suit contracts, at low levels, it is dangerous to double the opponents purely because your side has a lot of high cards. Sometimes, however, a player can judge that this might be the correct approach. This is where a good opening lead could make the difference between sweet success and abject failure.

Consider the following scenario from a pairs tournament: sitting West, at Love All, you hold:

♠ K 7 5
♥ J 2
♦ A 10 4 2
♣ Q J 10 6

Partner opens 1NT (12-14) and RHO overcalls 2♠, showing a five-card spade suit and an unspecified minor. There is no clear course of action

but if you pass, you suspect that a small plus score might prove to be inadequate compensation for whatever can be made by your side. You know that the opponents have an eight-card fit at best and you have strong holdings in both minors. Taking these points into consideration, and feeling rather brave, you decide to risk a double (for penalties in your system). Everyone passes and now it is your lead – what would you choose?

An obvious candidate is the queen of clubs but under these circumstances it often pays to lead a trump. To see how each of these options would have fared, let us reveal the full deal:

♠ 9 8 6		♠ Q 3
♥ 10 7 6 3		♥ K Q 8 4
♦ 7		♦ K 8 6 3
♣ A 9 7 3 2		♣ K 5 4
♠ K 7 5		♠ A J 10 4 2
♥ J 2		♥ A 9 5
♦ A 10 4 2		♦ Q J 9 5
♣ Q J 10 6		♣ 8

On the queen of clubs lead, there are many successful lines of play for declarer, one being to trump a club at trick two and subsequently crossruff in the minors. In this way, declarer cannot be prevented from scoring two trump tricks in dummy and four in hand to go with the two side-suit aces, thereby making 2♠ doubled – at least it shows the validity of our reservations.

In contrast, on a spade lead, East will contribute the queen, losing to the ace, and when declarer plays a diamond, the defenders can play two more rounds of trumps. In this way, by preventing diamond ruffs in the dummy, declarer can be restricted to four trump tricks and two aces – 2♠ doubled, two off, sweet success!

The deal illustrates a good general principle:

Tip: It is often a good idea to lead a trump when your side has most of the high cards.

Very often, the advantage of having the greater high-card strength can be exploited most efficiently by drawing as many of the enemy trumps as possible, thereby creating losers in the opponents' hands that, otherwise, would have been ruffed.

One word of warning: for this type of defence to be effective, the defenders must be able to draw at least three rounds of trumps. Therefore, when holding near-game values or better, it is usually advisable to bid on unless the opposing trump fit is known to be limited. When the conditions do seem to be appropriate, however, the most promising action might indeed be to double and lead a trump!

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CLUB PLAYER'S BIDDING QUIZ

ON each of the following problems, you are West. What should you bid with each hand on the given auction at pairs, Love All?

Julian Pottage gives his answers on page 54.

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Hand 1	W	N	E	S
♠ J 8 6 3	1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
♥ 8	?			
♦ A K Q 9 6				
♣ K 9 6				

Hand 2	W	N	E	S
♠ A Q 10 6 5		1♣	1♠	2♥
♥ J 3 2	?			
♦ 9 7 2				
♣ 8 7				

Hand 3	W	N	E	S
♠ 10 5 4 2				2♥ ¹
♥ K	?			
♦ A K 5	1 Weak			
♣ A Q 8 6 2				

Hand 4	W	N	E	S
♠ 9 7 3			1♣	Pass
♥ 8	1♦	Pass	2NT	Pass
♦ J 7 5 4 2	?			
♣ A Q 10 3				

Hand 5	W	N	E	S
♠ K Q 8 7 6			3♥	Pass
♥ Void	?			
♦ 10 9 7 5				
♣ A Q 5 4				

Hand 6	W	N	E	S
♠ Q	1♦	1♠	Pass	Pass
♥ A Q 10 8	?			
♦ A J 10 9 7				
♣ A 4 2				