



The Right Time to Play Your Ace

IN THIS series of articles I will try to provide some guidance on opening leads. In particular, I will be stressing the importance of listening to the bidding and trying to paint a picture of the opponents' hands. I will discuss, also, the circumstances when it might be right to lead passively. Throughout, I will attempt to give a rationale which can have a wider relevance.

Leading from A-K vs No-trumps

To start the ball rolling, consider these two hands:

Hand A	Hand B
♠ J 7	♠ J 7
♥ 8 7 5	♥ 8 7 5
♦ A K 6 5	♦ A K 8 6 5
♣ 9 5 4 2	♣ 9 4 2

Sitting West, after the auction below, what would you lead in each case?

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♥
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT ¹

¹ 15-17 points

In both instances, a diamond lead seems to be normal, providing the best chance of a source of tricks without giving much away – but which one?

Before answering this, I'd like to take a

step back and reflect upon a totally different situation. Imagine that you are about to attend four job interviews and, again, there are two scenarios:

1. One job is more to your liking than the others and you evaluate your chances of landing this post as being reasonable and better than your chances with the others. With all four, however, you know that you will still be looking for something better.
2. Again, you are not particularly confident of success with the first three interviews and neither do you find the corresponding positions particularly appealing. The fourth, however, seems like a great opportunity and, furthermore, you are fairly confident of being the strongest candidate.

In preparation, it might be sensible to adopt a different strategy for each of these two situations. In the first instance, you might decide to hedge your bets and treat each position more-or-less equally but, in the second, your strong preference for the fourth interview might cause you to concentrate on it, at the expense of the other three, regarding any time and effort spent as being a worthwhile investment.

Let us return to the lead problems from above. With hearts and spades having been bid, these suits seem to be particularly unpromising. A passive (trying not to give declarer a free trick) club lead might work well, especially if partner's clubs are strong but this might not be the right time to

adopt a passive stance. A good player on lead would realise that declarer is likely to be able to develop the hearts easily, by looking at his or her own heart holding and remembering the bidding – any finesse that declarer might require in this suit is likely to work. Bearing this in mind, it looks appropriate to attack by leading diamonds, which is probably what most players would do instinctively.

A brief analysis of possible diamond holdings in East's hand might help to illustrate how well a diamond lead might work in each instance – see the table at the bottom of the page.

Allowance should be made for the fact that East's expected diamond length is slightly shorter opposite ♦A-K-8-6-5 than opposite ♦A-K-6-5 but nevertheless, the table below illustrates two things:

1. A lead from ♦A-K-8-6-5 is more likely to develop extra tricks than a lead from ♦A-K-6-5.
2. When successful, a lead from ♦A-K-8-6-5 develops more extra tricks than one from ♦A-K-6-5.

This comparison suggests that with Hand A, West should not be too enthusiastic about a diamond lead – it might not work particularly well and even if it does, at least one more trick will have to come from somewhere else before the contract is beaten. As with the first job-hunt scenario, it is advisable for West to hedge his or her bets to some extent. This can be done by leading the ♦A and looking at the dummy before deciding what to do next (see example Deal A on the next page).

By comparison, on lead with Hand B, West should be willing to invest in the diamond suit, as with the second job-hunt scenario. The lead will work well often and when it does nothing else will be required to defeat the contract. The best way to invest in the diamond suit is to lead low. This is necessary when East holds ♦Q-x or ♦x-x and a quick entry, paying big

WEST'S HOLDING		EAST'S HOLDING
♦A-K-6-5	♦A-K-8-6-5	Q-x-x
4 tricks possible (3 likely)	5 tricks very likely	
3 tricks possible (2 likely)	4 tricks likely if the defence regains the lead in time	x-x-x
3 tricks (at best)	5 tricks possible (3 likely)	Q-x
2 tricks	4 tricks possible (2 likely)	x-x

dividends when there is a 3-3 break.

Tip: against no-trumps, it is normally correct to lead the ace from A-K-x-x but low from A-K-x-x-x.

Examples


On both the deals below, the bidding goes as shown on the previous page:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♥
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT ¹

¹ 15-17 points


On Deal A, West leads the ace of diamonds. East discourages, so West switches to a club to defeat 3NT. Note that the lead of a low diamond lets 3NT make.

Deal A
N/S Game. Dealer South.

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

By contrast, on Deal B West leads the six of diamonds. When East obtains the lead, the two of diamonds is returned to seal declarer's fate.

Deal B
N/S Game. Dealer South.

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

DAVID DAVENPORT

1930 - 2012



The EBU is sad to announce the death, at the end of 2012, of David Davenport, former Chairman of the Card Committee at the prestigious Portland Club*. David was a great supporter of the EBU and was behind each affiliated club being given a free copy of the Laws Book back in 2008. He also gave £5000 from his own charitable trust to the EBU's Youth and Education Trust in 2011.

DAVID TALBOT Henry Davenport was born in India in May 1930 where his father was working for Dunlop. The family soon returned to England and settled in the Wirral. David was sent to Mostyn House prep school and then Radley, where he learnt to row and was Captain of Boats in his last year. After Radley he did his National Service with the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry before going up to University College Oxford where he read PPE. He was soon back on the river, possibly to the detriment of his studies. He rowed very successfully for his college, and then earned a place in the Oxford Eight, rowing in the 1953 Boat Race. He graduated that year with his blue and his degree.

His business career began with the investment team at Canada Life. He was sent to Canada to train and then returned to be given the job of running the London office. In 1960 he left Canada Life and set up his own business, Portfolio Management, with his partner, James Rowlatt. The business prospered and was a template for investment management firms of the future. The business was successfully sold to Aitkin Hume in the late '70s. David soon moved on and set up a new business, CS Investments, with Sam Stephenson and Eric Crawford.

In 1960, David married Patricia Barham and they set about producing a family. Four children duly arrived, William, Sarah, Lucy and Jeremy. Family commitments inhibited David's other great love, bridge. His mother was a formidable player and David learnt to play at a young age and soon became a top player, playing for Oxford in a winning team vs Cambridge and regularly

playing at Crockfords. He played in the English trials in 1960 but gave up tournament bridge until much later in life as his family arrived. In 1972 he joined the Portland Club where he was one of the leading players. He was Chairman of the Card Committee for many years and made a major contribution to the 1997 edition of *The Laws of Rubber Bridge*. He was working on the next edition right up until his death, and was much concerned that the Portland Club made a significant contribution.

His business life meantime thrived. CS investments became Chiswell St and then later Sarasin, growing significantly. Following a chance dinner party meeting, David bought into a company, called Barbour Index, a specialist information service for architects. With his partner, Patrick Barbour, the business prospered and in 1972 they were able to purchase New Lodge in Berkshire for a very low price and later sold it for a substantial profit. Microgen, a software company, also emerged from Barbour and is capitalised today at £100m.

David retired from day to day work in his seventies but continued to be an active investor in the stock market. He returned to tournament bridge, and he and I struck up a very happy partnership playing in the Gold Cup and the Kent Congress where we won the major pairs event. David was a delightful partner, never complaining about my disappointing play and never ever behaving other than impeccably. He will be much missed by his wife, his four children, seven grandchildren and his many friends.

*(Giles Hargreave,
Deputy Chairman, Portland Club)*

*The Portland Club, London, is the oldest institution in the world to be responsible for the promulgation of the laws of bridge.