

## Leading against no trumps

When playing against a no trump contract the aim is to set up and take your tricks before the opponents set up and take theirs.

As defenders you have the advantage of the opening lead. Use it wisely!

Making a poor opening lead often costs you tricks and can make the difference between a good score and a poor score.

If you are on opening lead, you must decide which suit to lead and what card to lead from that suit.

Conventional wisdom says if you are on lead against no trumps, lead top of a sequence headed by an honour or fourth highest of your longest and strongest suit.

There are however other things for you to consider before making the opening lead.

### Which suit to lead?

Here are some things to consider when deciding which suit to lead.

#### ***Partner has bid***

Where partner has bid a suit, particularly if partner has overcalled, lead their suit unless there is a good reason not to.

West - You	North	East	South
	1C	1S	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT

You hold: Q5, QJ5, T7432, T87

The bidding clearly calls for a spade lead.

You should also lead partner's suit when they have opened in third seat. Even though they might have opened light, a lead of their suit is usually called for.

#### ***Partner has doubled an artificial bid***

Before landing in a no trump contract, your opponents may have used Stayman, transfers or fourth suit forcing.

A double of these artificial bids shows both length and strength in the suit doubled and is lead directing. Lead that suit if you are on lead (failure to double an artificial bid suggests leading another suit).

***You have a weak five-card suit and a strong four-card suit***

West - You	North	East	South
			1C
Pass	1D	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All pass	

You are on lead and hold: T7432, KQJ9, 94, Q6

Don't just automatically lead from your longest suit. Here prefer a heart lead over leading from a poor spade suit.

***You have two suits of about equal strength***

When you have two suits of the same length and roughly the same strength, prefer to lead a major suit over a minor suit.

This is particularly the case when the opponents reach 3NT and have not gone through a Stayman sequence, allowing you to draw the inference that dummy does not have a four card major.

West - You	North	East	South
			1NT
Pass	3NT	All pass	

You hold: QT64, A8, QT64, 954.

Lead a spade and not a diamond as north is unlikely to have four spades.

West - You	North	East	South
			1NT
Pass	2C	Pass	2H
Pass	3NT	All pass	

After this bidding sequence, however, it is better to lead a diamond as north has four spades.

***You have two not so equal strength suits***

When you have two suits of equal length, it is generally better to lead the stronger suit.

What about this hand: 83, Q952, K54, KT63?

Unless your minor suit contains an honour sequence or three honours, lead the major. Lead hearts.

***You have two suits of equal length and one is headed by an ace***

West - You	North	East	South
			2NT
	1D	Pass	
Pass	3NT	All pass	

You hold: KT643, A8632, T6, 9

With two suits of equal length and strength, lead the suit without the ace. This preserves your entry once the spade suit has been set up.

***When the bidding suggests your opponents are going to run a long suit***

West - You	North	East	South
	1D	Pass	1H
Pass	3D	Pass	3NT

You hold: J7432, 987, Q4, KQ8.

Here the bidding suggests declarer will run a six or seven card diamond suit so an attacking lead is called for. Lead the king of clubs.

***Your hand is weak and your long suit is poor***

West - You	North	East	South
			1C
Pass	1H	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All pass	

You hold: 853, T7432, 83, K93.

This situation requires you to think about what partner may have, given you have a very poor hand and a poor long suit. The bidding suggests your opponents have about 25 HCP, leaving your partner with roughly an opening hand. Why did they not bid? If partner had long spades it is likely that they would have bid them when they had the opportunity to do so at the one level. It is likely they have long clubs or long diamonds but didn't want to bid them at the two level.

***Your longest suit is AQxx as opposed to AQxxx***

When you lead from AQ against a no trump contract there is a good chance the king is to your right and if you don't lead that suit declarer cannot take a trick with the king.

When you lead from AQxx the most you can make from the suit is three tricks. When you lead from AQxxx, however, you have a good chance of making four tricks, making it a good lead against no trumps.

***Leading against 6NT***

West - You	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	4NT
Pass	6NT	All pass	

You hold: QT4, KT432, T98, T8.

You would lead a low heart against 3NT hoping to establish your long suit. Against 6NT however you only need two tricks to defeat the contract so a different strategy is called

for. Avoid giving declarer a cheap trick in hearts and hope they need a heart or spade finesse to make their contract. Lead a diamond.

## **Which card to lead?**

The card you lead should convey information to your partner about your holding in that suit – otherwise how else does partner know whether to continue that suit or switch to another suit?

### ***Leading from a perfect sequence***

A perfect sequence is a suit headed by three consecutive honours: AKQ, KQJ, QJT, JT9.

The suit can be any length but is usually four cards or longer.

Lead top of the sequence.

### ***Leading from an imperfect sequence***

An imperfect sequence is two consecutive honours and a third card but missing exactly one card in the sequence: AKJ, KQT, QJ9.

Lead top of the sequence.

### ***Leading from a suit without a sequence***

Mostly you will be leading from a long suit without a sequence and maybe one or two honours. Lead the fourth highest.

KT73            Lead the 3

J9742           Lead the 4

QT8532        Lead the 5

### ***Leading from three worthless cards***

Sometimes you will lead from a worthless three card suit: 953, 864, 732 for example.

Lead the highest 'top of nothing'.

### ***Leading from four worthless cards***

Lead second highest to discourage partner from continuing the suit.

With a suit like 9732 you would lead the seven, avoiding giving up the 9 which may be useful later. Similarly with T732, lead the seven (although the 10 is technically an honour).

### ***Leading from a suit headed by two touching honours***

With four or more cards in the suit lead fourth highest: AK76, AK764, KQ 863, QJ86, JT76.

With only three cards in the suit, lead the highest hoping partner has length in the suit: KQ6, QJ4, JT2.

The exception to this is when you hold AKx, where you can choose to 'underlead'. This is subject to partnership agreement. The benefit of this is that a lead of the ace now shows AKQJ.

### ***Leading from three cards headed by an honour***

With a three card suit headed by an honour lead low: Q73 lead the three.

### ***Leading from a doubleton***

Doubleton leads are usually from a suit partner has bid. Lead the top.

Sometimes you lead from a doubleton when the bidding suggests partner has length in that suit.

<b>West - You</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
			1NT
Pass	2C	Pass	2S
Pass	3NT	All pass	

You hold: 97432, JT, Q53, J94.

Here you know dummy has four hearts and that declarer does not so your powers of deduction tell you that partner has four or five hearts. Your spade suit is poor and you have nothing much in the minors so take a punt on leading the jack of hearts, through dummy's heart suit.

### ***Leading from a suit with an 'interior sequence'***

An interior sequence is an honour sequence where the two lower cards are in sequence: KJT, QT9.

There are difference methods for leading from an interior sequence. The simplest is to lead the top of the interior sequence: from KJT lead the jack, noting that partner might assume that it is top of a sequence.