



Thursday afternoon at the Erlanger Lions Club brought another round of the NKY Four-Is-Enough duplicate game. The Fifth Chair — that invisible observer with all four hands in view — has again picked a few of the most interesting deals to discuss. This session's recap will focus solely on opening leads, for which Henry discussed related strategy prior to the game. Find a partner and join us for this relaxed game again on August 6. Before reading on, take a look at each hand and auction below and decide on your lead. The full discussion follows. Boards are numbered as in the game, and unless a question is asked, you should simply pick the opening lead.

Board 1

North opens 1NT, and all pass. East, on lead, holds:

♠K87 ♥KJ9 ♦A6 ♣Q8632

Board 3

West opens 3♣, East bids 3NT, and all pass. South, on lead, holds:

♠AQT2 ♥AJT7 ♦J952 ♣3

Board 4

North holds: ♠A92 ♥— ♦AT9876 ♣KJ53

The auction:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♦	4♥	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♥	Pass
Pass	Double	Pass	Pass

You lead the ♠A. Dummy appears with:

♠653 ♥976532 ♦Q ♣A84

Partner follows ♠4, and declarer plays the ♠10.

What do you do next?

Board 5

In North you hold: ♠AK93 ♥Q9732 ♦A ♣K54

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Board 9

As East you hold: ♠K97 ♥863 ♦Q984 ♠T94

The auction:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥	All Pass	
Pass	Pass		

Board 11

South opens 1NT, North bids 2♣ (Stayman), South responds 2♦, and North raises to 3NT, ending the auction. As West, on lead you hold:

♠Q97 ♥97 ♦AJ864 ♣JT6

Board 12

West opens 2♠, East raises to 4♠, ending the auction. As North, on lead you hold:

♠— ♥AT6542 ♦Q53 ♣J982

Board 13

As East you hold: ♠A652 ♥J96 ♦93 ♣J975

The auction:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	3♥
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass

Board 15

As East you hold: ♠J872 ♥JT962 ♦6 ♣863

The auction:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	3NT	Pass	6NT

Board 17

North opens 1NT, South transfers with 2♥, and North completes the transfer with 2♠, ending the auction. You, on lead, hold: ♠5 ♥J6432 ♦QJ96 ♣KQ5

Board 1

North opens 1NT, and all pass. East, on lead, holds:

♠K87 ♥KJ9 ♦A6 ♣Q8632

What is our opening lead?

First count points. Declarer has 15-17 and we have 13. That leaves 10-12 for partner and dummy, and we should assume partner has half of those since dummy made no move to game. We also know dummy doesn't have a five card major since they didn't make a transfer. So...spades.

If we lead that suit, expect declarer to have AQ and get an extra trick. Our king is meant to capture her queen. Hearts is exactly the same. And in diamonds – aces are meant to capture kings and queens, always. This leaves clubs.

There are plenty of potential entries, so 4th best club makes a lot of sense here – try to set up at least 1 or 2 extra tricks in clubs while declarer is losing tricks to our other cards. Lead the ♣3.

Board 3

West opens 3♣, East bids 3NT, and all pass. South, on lead, holds:

♠AQT2 ♥AJT7 ♦J952 ♣3

What is our opening lead?

This is a tough hand. Partner surely has very little. And to set the contract, we need partner to be able to get in. So let's start by assuming that can happen (in my world, partner will hold the ♣A). If partner has an entry, we need 4 other tricks. We have two (aces) and would need to set up two more in either hearts or spades (leading diamond should not be a consideration here – the jack might be a stopper as long as we don't lead it).

If we choose heart – the lead card should be ♥J. Why? Place East with KQx. They will win the Q, but then partner will get in and lead through the king.

If we choose spade, this is trickier. We shouldn't lead the 2, as this may allow declarer to win very cheaply depending on how the cards lie. But also not the ace. Probably the 10.

Given that spades is more difficult, my choice would be the ♥J. If we decide to lead a spade, lead the 10 so that at least one of the other two honors is forced.

Board 4

As North we hold: ♠A92 ♥— ♦AT9876 ♣KJ53

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♦	4♥	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♥	Pass
Pass	Double	Pass	Pass

We lead the ♠A and dummy comes down with:

♠653 ♥976532 ♦Q ♣A84

Partner follows with the ♠4, and declarer plays the ♠10. **What next?**

We have won the ♠A and will almost certainly win the ♦A. But we need a 3rd trick. Since dummy will ruff diamonds, and declarer will surely ruff spades, the 3rd trick must come from the club suit. And there is a risk in the diamond suit that declarer pitch clubs on the ♦KJ if he holds them, once the ace is removed. So timing is important – we must lead a club now.

Lead the ♣3, so that partner knows we have an honor. (As the cards lie on this board, that results in a two-trick set when partner holds the ♣Q and declarer also has 3.)

Board 5

As North we hold: ♠AK93 ♥Q9732 ♦A ♣K54

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		

What do we lead?

This is a hand where we have a supported ace in spade. So that is the natural lead. It is also a hand where we know partner has next to nothing, so we don't want to be breaking (being the first to lead) other suits for declarer.

At the table I led the ♠K (I prefer king from ace-king and king-queen combinations – usually partner can figure out the rest from dummy, and I like the ace lead to be a singleton, requesting a suit-preference signal from partner). After cashing the king and ace, I also cashed the ♦A (I don't want to be thrown back in with it and forced to lead some other suit).

A Second Look is written by Joe Nolan and edited by Claude 4.6. All typos, errant bids, poor declarer plays, and any other fumbles should naturally be attributed to Claude.

At trick 4, I exit spade, and hope there will be another trick to come in one of the other suits (we eventually got a club trick when declarer tried to finesse the 9 and lost to partner's 10). Had I ever led a club or heart, I would be giving declarer a trick. Interestingly, this was a rare hand on which it was actually a good idea to give declarer a ruff-sluff at trick 4!

Board 9

North opens 1NT, South transfers with 2♦, and North completes the transfer with 2♥, ending the auction. We, on lead, hold:

♠K97 ♥863 ♦Q984 ♣T94

What is our opening lead?

We have only five points, but since they stopped in 2♥, partner likely has at least 10. We have two honors and should immediately reject the idea of leading either of those suits, because declarer opened 1NT, and we have no information from partner – leading either of those suits could easily give away a trick.

Also, perish the thought of leading hearts. That is the one thing South promises, but if we lead them, we may give declarer a free finesse through partner that she might otherwise lose.

Having rejected three suits, the only suit left is clubs. Lead the ♣T (so that partner knows we have the 9).

Board 11

South opens 1NT, North bids 2♣ (Stayman), South responds 2♦, and North raises to 3NT, ending the auction. We, on lead, hold:

♠Q97 ♥97 ♦AJ864 ♣JT6

What is our opening lead?

When we lead against NT, 4th from longest and strongest is often a good lead. Here, it is not. Let's think about the hand – the opponents have suggested they have at least 25 HCP. We have 8, that leaves partner with at most 7. Also, the auction implies that NT opener has at least 7 minor suit cards since they did not show a major. That fact makes diamond a somewhat dangerous lead – if partner has no diamond honor, we may be leading into declarer's ♦KQT. So let's say we choose not to lead a diamond.

How about a major? Well, dummy has suggested holding at least one of those, so a major suit lead may also easily give a trick. Here, for better or worse I'm choosing the ♣6, since that lead seems least likely to give anything away.

Why the ♣6 and not the ♣J? Well, if partner happens to have the ♣Q or ♣K, I want to make sure my ♣JT will get to take a trick. If partner doesn't – then it doesn't matter which of the three I lead.

Board 12

West opens 2♠, East raises to 4♠, ending the auction. We, on lead, hold:

♠— ♥AT6542 ♦Q53 ♣J982

What is our opening lead?

First, what do we expect from the hand? Declarer has 6 spades and few points, while dummy is likely to have many points. It can be tempting to lead the ♥A here, since we have six of them (and that actually would turn out to work on this hand, since partner has a singleton). But remember, leading an unsupported ace is more likely to give away a trick than not. So let's reject that and choose a minor.

I'm choosing the ♦3. If partner should have the ♦K, that gets a diamond trick set up for us while we might still have an entry to collect it. Since I only have the ♣J, that lead is less likely to be helpful unless partner has really good club suit (unlikely on the auction).

As it turns out at the table, when partner eventually gets in he will lead a ♥ and we will still have time to give him the ruff anyway.

Board 13

North opens 1♦, South responds 1♥, North rebids 2♣, South bids 3♥, and North closes with 3NT, ending the auction. We, on lead, hold:

♠A652 ♥J96 ♦93 ♣J975

What is our opening lead?

I know the spade suit isn't ideal here, but it is unbid, and the auction suggests an aggressive lead. Let's discuss why.

We hold three hearts, and dummy's bidding suggests six hearts, probably running since we know the break won't be bad for declarer. Furthermore, whatever diamond that declarer needs partner to

hold, we know that suit is nicely positioned for them as well since all we have is ♦93. So declarer is surely making this contract, the only question is whether we can find a few tricks first.

Lead the ♠2. On a good day, partner will have ♠KQx and we'll score four spades before they can get in.

Board 15

North opens 1♣, South responds 1♦, North bids 1♥, South bids 1♠, North jumps to 3NT, and South closes with 6NT, ending the auction. We, on lead, hold:

♠J872 ♥JT962 ♦6 ♣863

What is our opening lead?

First, do not overthink this hand. We want the safest lead we can make so as to hopefully not give away a trick. While the 1♠ bid is possibly just 4th suit forcing, the opponents likely have something in the suit, and underleading the ♠J could give a trick.

They've bid hearts, but we have five to the ♥JT9. Easy top-of-sequence lead – ♥J is very unlikely to give declarer any tricks, so that would be my choice of leads. Make declarer play the hand.

If we lead the ♥J here, as the cards lie she is unlikely to make.

Board 17

North opens 1NT, South transfers with 2♥, and North completes the transfer with 2♠, ending the auction. We, on lead, hold:

♠5 ♥J6432 ♦QJ96 ♣KQ5

What is our opening lead?

First of all, resist the urge to lead the ♠5. That's very likely to help declarer by finessing partner (who likely had at least 3 if not more cards in the suit).

Since we have 5 hearts, leading a heart probably won't give away a trick, so that's a safe lead. But in the minors we have sequences – ♦QJ9 and ♣KQ. We should probably choose one of those.

And it should be a diamond and not a club. Why? Declarer likely has the ♣A for the NT opener. So there's a chance we can win the ♣K and ♣Q if declarer leads that suit. In diamonds, even if declarer holds ♦AKT (as on the actual hand), the ♦Q is perfectly safe and will never allow declarer to score that 10. And it may do better if partner happens to have an honor in the suit. Lead the ♦Q.

Director's Corner

Newer players can often be wary of calling the director, or worse, having the director called to their table. But remember that Mr. or Ms. PLEASE is there to help. The director's responsibility is to ensure equity when an irregularity (such as an insufficient bid or a play out of turn occurs).

So when should you call? Whenever there is an irregularity at your table, and typically at the time it happens and not later in the hand. Does it matter if there is qualified director playing at the table (or if you are a qualified director yourself)? No it does not. A wise nationally rated director taught me early on that self-ruling at your own table is not at all a best practice.

One of the most difficult things for newer players is asking and or answering questions about the auction. I've been directing bridge games since the early 2000s, and here are some possibly sage pieces of advice.

1. If asked about your partner's call, tell your opponents about your agreements, but don't guess. If you aren't sure or the bid isn't something you've seen or discussed with partner, it is perfectly appropriate to say that you have no agreement.
2. If the opponents are having an auction and alerting several bids, you have the right to ask about their bids when it is your turn. That does not mean that you should ask. Usually, unless you are wanting to bid something, it is best to be quiet until the end of the auction. Even the strongest players, playing systems needing lots of alerts, will sometimes confuse themselves with their own bidding. At the end of the auction, before the bidding cards are picked up from the table, ideally the opponents should (without prompting) tell you about their auction so that you have some understanding before the opening lead. But if they do not, that is usually the best time to ask. If you and partner make a practice of doing it that way regardless of the cards in your hand, now they will also gain no accidental inference from the query as well.
3. As a newer player, try to remember to announce your NT range (e.g. "fifteen to seventeen"), announce the transfer suit when partner transfers (e.g. "hearts" when partner responds two diamonds to your NT opening), and alert your overcalls of the opponents NT opening if you have agreed to play something other than natural. Generally newer players will not be needing other alerts until they have played for a while and are comfortable with more complex systems. And if, as a newer player you forget to alert, don't worry. We are still glad to have you at the table.

If you have a question about any of the mechanics of the game, remember the director is there to help!