

Opening Lead Deductions By Declarer

When the opening lead comes down, many declarers become fixated on the dummy. Some common questions are "Where the heck is the hand you bid in the auction?" and "How on earth am I going to make this darn thing?" It is important to stop for a bit and make a plan for how you are going to make this contract. While making this plan, do not neglect to consider the choice that LHO made when selecting their opening lead.

The 2 most important questions to ask yourself about an opening lead are:

- Why did they select this suit?
- What does the card led tell me about the honor holdings in that suit?

Why did LHO lead this suit?

Sometimes this is obvious from the auction. It's the suit they (or their partner) have bid, or the auction has said this is the suit we are weak in.

1H-1N - AP	1S-2C
	2D-3C
	3H-3S
	4S

No one should be surprised by a heart lead on either of these auctions.

If the auction didn't suggest an opening lead, then we should be thinking about the opening leader's holding in the suit led. In NT, they are usually either trying to setup their suit or their partner's. So expect a long suit in one hand or the other. In a trump contract there's always the chance that they are leading a short suit looking for a ruff. This last case is especially true if the auction called for a particular suit to be led and yet that wasn't the suit chosen.

After we've thought about what suit was led, let's consider the actual card that hit the table.

What card was led?

It's important to work out if the opponent is leading their own suit or their partner's. But let's just focus on the lead of an unbid suit to keep this lecture simple enough to deal with in 30 minutes.

The lead of an honor

Unless the opponents are doing something tricky (and I suggest you look at their convention card to see if they are) you can usually place the card above the led honor in some other hand and the card below the honor in the leader's hand.

	98	
Q		??
	A54	

You can place the king in RHO's hand and the jack in LHO's. In a suit contract we do not know where the ten is. If this is NT, you can often place the ten with the opening leader because 3 honors are safer to lead an honor from than only 2.

The lead of an ace

Unlike any other honor, aces can be led without support. In NT, they are most often led only with the king since it's safe to underlead an ace in order to try and establish a length trick in a suit. In a suit contract keep in mind that they may just have been taking a peek at dummy. If you have the king when an ace is lead against a trump contract, keep in mind that *all of the the opening leader's other choices were worse than leading an unsupported ace.*

The lead of a spot card

At first glance it seems like the lead of a 3 doesn't reveal much about the suit being led, but upon reflection we can infer a lot using the concept that the lead of a spot card denies the holding of touching honors in a suit contract, and often implies the lack of them in NT as well. Furthermore since this was the chosen suit, no safe honor sequences are likely to exist in other suits either!

654

3 Q

A98

The missing honor cards are the KJT. The one we can place with certainty is the jack. If RHO held both the queen and the jack they would have played the jack not the queen so LHO holds the jack.

The king could be in either hand, but with KJT the opening lead should be the jack and with JT it's normal to lead the jack against a suit contract. Hence in a suit contract we can conclusively place the ten with RHO, whereas in NT LHO may still hold it, but not both the king and the ten.