

PLAY OF TOUCHING HONOURS

Bridge is a game of communication, and it is important to convey the correct message by playing the correct card. Various themes are used – count, attitude, suit preference etc., but a more fundamental consideration is in which card to play when holding touching honours.

There are three main common situations that must be considered when playing a card from touching honours:

Declarer Play

1)	♠ AQJ	
	♥ 942	
	♦ 43	
	♣ A10653	
♠ 1097653		♠ 8
♥ AK7		♥ Q863
♦ 87		♦ QJ1062
♣ 84		♣ KQ7
	♠ K42	
	♥ J105	
	♦ AK95	
	♣ J92	

Contract – 2NT by South

Against South's 2NT. West leads his second highest spade (from a bad suit). South now assess the hand, and intends to win 3 Spades, 2 Diamonds, and 4 Clubs, assuming the Club suit breaks favourably (9 tricks). He needs to win these before the defence can find a heart switch.

So, after winning the lead in hand, he plays ♣J, losing to East. East then not unnaturally plays the ♦Q, won by South (? the A or the K). South continues with a club, again losing to East.

What does East now continue?

If on the original diamond from East, South had played the ♦K, then the fact that West doesn't play the Ace, means that South also hold the Ace himself. However, if South had previously played the ♦A, then from East's perspective, South may or may not hold the ♦K.

If South had originally played the ♦K, then East would have no option other than to switch to a heart (the winning defence holding declarer to seven tricks), whereas if South originally plays the ♦A, then East is on a guess as to which red suit to play.

2)	a)	♠ A93	b)	♠ A93
		♥ 874		♥ 874
		♦ 752		♦ 752
		♣ AQJ9		♣ AQJ9
	♠ 4			♠ 4
	♥ J6532			♥ K653
	♦ AQ6			♦ A963
	♣ K865			♣ K865
		♠ K76		♠ K76
		♥ Q109		♥ Q109
		♦ J1084		♦ J1084
		♣ 742		♣ 742
		♠ QJ10852		♠ QJ10852
		♥ AK		♥ AJ2
		♦ K93		♦ KQ
		♣ 103		♣ 103

South is declarer in 4♠

West leads the ♥3. East assesses the situation, and now knows that partner has led from an honour. But is it the Jack (a) or the King (b). (It cannot be the ace – you should never underlead an ace against a suit contract).

He plays the ♥Q and South wins with the Ace. Declarer now takes the losing spade finesse, but what does East return. If the layout is (a) it is correct to return a diamond, but if (b) it is correct to play a heart. He is on a guess

However, if South had won the opening lead with the King (a), East would know that he also holds the Ace, and would therefore switch to diamond.

DECLARER SHOULD ALWAYS PLAY THE HIGHER OF TOUCHING HONOURS

Defender Play – Following To Partner's Lead

a)	♠ KJ863 ♥ 9 ♦ 742 ♣ AQJ5	b)	♠ KJ863 ♥ 9 ♦ 742 ♣ AQJ5
♠ A7 ♥ A832 ♦ K1053 ♣ 963	♠ 104 ♥ J1075 ♦ QJ6 ♣ 10872	♠ A7 ♥ A832 ♦ K1053 ♣ 963	♠ 104 ♥ J1075 ♦ Q96 ♣ K1072
	♠ Q52 ♥ KQ64 ♦ A98 ♣ K4		♠ Q52 ♥ KQ64 ♦ AJ8 ♣ 84

4♠ by South

In (a) and (b) West leads ♦3. In (a) assume East plays the ♦J. South will win with the ♦A. The second round of trumps is won by West – what does he play next. Since East originally played the ♦J, West ‘knows’ that South doesn’t have the ♦Q (he would have more cheaply won with the ♦Q, not having the ♦K), so this card is with partner East. He therefore is able to safely continue with diamonds, and the declarer will be one-off.

In (a), if originally East had incorrectly played the ♦Q, as is also the perforce situation in (b), West will know that South doesn’t have the ♦Q, but has the ♦J as well as the ♦A, so will be forced to switch to a club, and then East can lead through declarer’s ♦J8.

IN FOLLOWING TO PARTNER'S LEAD ALWAYS PLAY THE LOWER OF TOUCHING HONOURS.

Defender's Lead

This is the standard lead situation, in which you should lead the top of an honour sequence. However there are some exceptions – some partnerships with AK... will lead the K, requesting partner to give ‘count’ rather than ‘attitude’ (the 10 is not usually counted as an honour from 109...)

WHEN LEADING WITH AN HONOUR SEQUENCE – LEAD THE HIGHEST HONOUR

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