

SMITH PETERS

The Smith Peter (sometimes known as the Smith Echo) is probably the most polarising of techniques in the bridge world. Great players either love it or loathe it. For example Paul Hackett can't do without it, but probably the greatest player in the world – Bob Hamman – considers it to be offensive.

It is a technique employed by either defender to indicate 'attitude' regarding the opening lead against a no-trump contract. It was devised in the early 60s by (Ian) Geoff Smith from Hampshire.

How does it work? The principle is very simple. On the first trick played by declarer, whether it be led from dummy or from his hand, either defender can play an unnecessary high card to say to partner 'I like the suit originally led'. Conversely a low card would say 'I'd prefer you to switch to a suit different to that originally led when you get the lead'. (Some players complicate matters by playing Reverse Smith Peters – a low card encourages the original suit led, a high card discourages it).

There are two main scenarios in which it is employed.

1. Smith Peter by Partner Of Opening Leader

When a player plays an honour opposite his partner's lead, does he also have the next higher honour?

Consider this example which can be a nightmare for defenders:

	♠ A84		
	♥ KQ6		
	♦ 63		
	♣ KQJ97		
♠ 9752		(a)	(b)
♥ 852		♠ 1063	(1063)
♦ A10754		♥ A93	(J93)
♣ A		♦ J82	(QJ2)
	(a)	♣ 8654	(8654)
	♠ KQJ	(b)	
	♥ J1074	(KQJ)	
	♦ KQ9	(A1074)	
	♣ 1032	(K98)	
		(1032)	

(North: 1♣ - 1♥ - 2♥ - 3NT) – West leads ♦5 - fourth highest. East inserts the ♦J, and South correctly wins with his highest honour - ♦K. Declarer now tries to establish the club suit with West winning his ace. The problem is quite simple – does West now play his partner (East) for the ♥A (the actual hand (a), or for the ♦Q or even four diamonds (hand (b))). In the first case the heart entry enables East to switch to a diamond through declarer's Queen. In the second case the defence can immediately run four tricks in diamonds, Get it wrong and declarer makes his contract.

There is no convenient way of distinguishing which holding East has, other than by using Smith Peters. On the play of a club, East in this case would play his ♣4 (low), which would discourage the original suit – diamonds. The only sensible switch from West would now be a heart, – contract one off following East's diamond return. If he had hand (b), playing Smith Peters, East would play the ♣8 (high) encouraging a continuation of the first suit (diamonds).

Some defenders play count on partner's opening lead particularly when not attempting to win the trick. Smith Peters can be invaluable in these situations.

(South: 1NT – 3NT)

	♠ A		
	♥ K94		
	♦ AK642		
	♣ 8653	(a)	(b)
♠ K10652		♠ Q873	(9873)
♥ QJ6		♥ 10832	(A1032)
♦ QJ10		♦ 73	(73)
♣ 92	(a)	♣ QJ10	(J104)
	♠ J94	(b)	
	♥ A75	(QJ4)	
	♦ 985	(875)	
	♣ AK74	(985)	
		(AKQ7)	

West lead a standard ♠5, and East shows count with ♠8. Declarer wins and plays a diamond, ducking West's honour. What does West return. A spade is correct if the layout is as hand (a), but a heart switch is correct with hand (b). Guess the situation wrong and declarer makes his contract. Smith Peters to the rescue – if East plays the ♦7 on declarers lead he is requesting you to continue with your original suit (hand (a)), whereas with hand (b), he would discourage spades by playing ♦3, and the heart switch is obvious to West in order to have any chance of defeating the contract.

2. Smith Peter by Opening Leader

I would again further split this into two discussions.

2.1 The standard lead of the 4th. highest is normally from a suit containing one or more honours – but is it one, or two honours.

Consider this hand:

(South: 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT – 3NT)

		♠ 984	
		♥ A10762	
		♦ 72	
		♣ AQ5	
(a)	(b)		♠ J1052
♠ AQ76	(Q763)		♥ KJ
♥ 843	(843)		♦ J95
♦ Q1084	(AQ84)		♣ J1043
♣ 86	(86)	(a)	(b)
		♠ K3	(AK)
		♥ Q95	(Q95)
		♦ AK63	(K1063)
		♣ K972	(K972)

West leads ♦4 (fourth highest), and declarer wins East's ♦J with ♦A. Declarer takes a losing heart finesse to East – what does he return? The spade switch is required with hand (a), but the diamonds could be running for four tricks (hand (b)) on a diamond continuation (opening leader's suit). Playing Smith Peters, West would play ♥3 with hand (a), discouraging the original diamond continuation, but would play ♥8 with hand (b), encouraging the original diamond continuation.

2.2 The lead of a J can be from the top of a sequence or top of an interior sequence – but which?

This hand is taken from the Porthcawl Bridge Club Hand Of The Month (April 2010, re-orientated) (see website).

(South: 1NT – 3NT)

		♠ AK5	
		♥ 87	
		♦ 543	
		♣ AK1083	
(a)	(b)		♠ 987
♠ Q62	(Q62)		♥ QJ102
♥ 943	(A943)		♦ Q87
♦ KJ1092	(J1096)	(a)	♣ Q52
♣ 94	(94)	♠ J1043	(b)
		♥ AK65	(J104)
		♦ A6	(K65)
		♣ J76	(AK2)
			(J76)

With South declarer in 3NT, West leads the ♦J (top of an interior sequence. South wins and takes a losing club finesse. What should East return? A diamond is correct with the hand shown (hand (a)), but a heart switch is imperative with [hand \(b\)](#). Smith Peters solve the dilemma. When declarer plays the club, with hand (a), West would play the ♣9, encouragement for the initial suit led. With [hand \(b\)](#) he would play the ♣4 discouraging a diamond continuation, and asking for an (obvious) heart switch.

I distinguish this specific lead (i.e. J from top of an interior sequence), from the treatment of standard 4th. highest leads (see 2.1 above), since in this case there is an alternative way of distinguishing between the two hands. This is by adopting the 'Strong 10' modification to your standard leads.

"The lead of the 10 against no-trumps guarantees the 'J' and/or the '9', together with a higher non-touching honour'.

So with hand (a) West would lead the ♦10, whereas with [hand \(b\)](#) he would lead the ♦J.

Don't Always Smith Peter

There are a few situations where you don't Smith Peter at the first opportunity.

- obviously when you have a singleton in declarer's first suit
- when you are trying to win the first trick (so in 2.1 above, West can Smith Peter, but East is winning the heart with his King – obviously not a Smith Peter
- when you cannot afford to play a high card – usually an honour
- when there is a long suit in dummy with no entry, it is more important to give count.

It is the combination of the above restraints particularly the last one (together with the fact that unless you practice them they can be forgotten), that can give rise to confusion over their usage.

Other Considerations

Smith Peters are a defensive mechanism and obviously work in defenders' favour (but are not infallible), and good declarers can exploit them to some degree.

- as declarer don't necessarily play a small card to the suit that you first lead

- the defenders are not only telling each other the location of key cards, they are also telling you. Take note (it may affect whether you take a finesse into a danger hand or go for an anti percentage drop).

Smith Peters can lead to problems when the appropriate defender only has high cards say doubleton 98) and would like to play low (in 2.2 above, take the ♥8 away from West, and declarer leads the ♥9. With only the ♥43 West's Smith Peter becomes ambiguous).

Alternatives

The only practical alternative is the adoption of the Strong 10 principle – but this is only in specific situations (see 2.2 above).

Prior to the invention of Smith Peters there existed a bidding technique – the Rosenkranz Double – which identified an honour in partners hand e.g. (1♦) - 1♠ - (2♣) – dbl. Here the double shows a raise in spades with one of the top three honours. Yes, on very specific hands it can resolve lead continuation problems (example 1.1), but in all honesty I don't think this is one of Dr. Rosenkranz's better ideas)