

LEADING – TO SUCCESS OR DISASTER

I had so many requests for more information about opening leads that I'll concentrate on them for a few weeks.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♥
1♠	2♣	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

You, West, hold:

♠ A K 10 8 6
 ♥ 3 2
 ♦ A Q 6 5
 ♣ 8 7

You lead the ♠A (or ♠K, depending on your style). Personally, I lead the Ace for attitude and King for count – nicely alliterative. Partner plays the ♠Q and declarer plays the ♠4. You can see:

Dummy

♠ 9 7
 ♥ A 9 6
 ♦ 10 9
 ♣ K Q J 10 9 4

You

♠ A K 10 8 6
 ♥ 3 2
 ♦ A Q 6 5
 ♣ 8 7

Partner's Queen is NOT discouraging. They should play a different high spade in that case. The Queen should be played to show the Queen-Jack (or it is a singleton). So, your next consideration should be who you want to be on lead after trick 2? If you want to be on lead, then you should continue with the ♠K. However, if you want partner on lead, you should lead a low spade. Either partner will win their Jack or ruff the spade lead.

On this hand, given your points, you desperately want partner on lead, to lead a diamond through declarer's ♦K. Therefore, you lead the ♠6, and partner will return a diamond, giving you the first four tricks.

	♠ 9 7	
	♥ A 9 6	
	♦ 10 9	
	♣ K Q J 10 9 4	
♠ A K 10 8 6		♠ Q J 3 2
♥ 3 2		♥ 8 7
♦ A Q 6 5		♦ J 8 7 4 2
♣ 8 7		♣ 6 5
	♠ 5 4	
	♥ K Q J 10 5 4	
	♦ K 3	
	♣ A 3 2	

Just because partner leads an honour, you don't have to play an encouraging ♠2. Help partner to get you on lead! Those clubs in dummy look far too threatening.

Rule: If partner leads an honour, showing touching honours, and you have a relevant 'sequence' under their honours – e.g. they lead the Ace and you have Queen-Jack – play the higher honour to show that you have the missing honours. If partner leads the Ace and you hold King-Queen-Jack, play the King so they know they can continue the suit, especially if any 'small' cards you hold aren't that small (e.g. K-Q-J-10).

Similarly, if partner leads a Queen against a No Trump contract, which you believe shows the Q-J-10 or Q-J-9, play the 10 when you hold it. It's not discouraging – it's letting them know it is safe to continue with their three-card sequence should they regain the lead. If you don't play the 10, they should attribute the 10 to declarer!

You should be adept at this hand now:

West

♠ 10 8

♥ Q J 8

♦ J 6

♣ Q J 10 9 3 2

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♠	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

Your lead?

What has the auction told you? North has 6-9 HCP and 2 hearts (and 6 spades) – so you think. South has an invitational hand with 6 hearts and 4 clubs. You should lead the ♥Q. It will be safe from any finessing in dummy, given that dummy has 2 hearts. You want to stop any club ruffs. Here's the hand:

	♠ A J 9 7 5	
	♥ 3	
	♦ A 10 7 5 4 2	
	♣ 5	
♠ 10 8		♠ K Q 6 3 2
♥ Q J 8		♥ 9 7 6
♦ J 6		♦ K Q 8
♣ Q J 10 9 3 2		♣ 8 6
	♠ 4	
	♥ A K 10 5 4 2	
	♦ 9 3	
	♣ A K 7 4	

West decided to try leading the unbid suit – her doubleton diamond. Curtains! Declarer won the ♦A, cashed the ♣A and ruffed a club. She cashed the ♠A and ruffed a spade back to hand, then led three rounds of hearts (needing hearts to break 3-3). She lost 1 heart, 1 diamond and 1 club.

Three suits had been bid, so you are 'supposed' to lead a trump – especially when your trump suit is so 'safe' to lead.

Not a single West led a trump at the national tournament where this hand occurred (38 tables)! Don't worry – there's hope for all of us. (I was one of the lucky declarers.) *(By the way, pity North having to make a rebid on this hand! She chose to raise to 4♥ because she held two aces and that club singleton.)*

Finally,

West	North	East	South
		1♣	
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠ (GF)	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

What would you lead as North with:

♠ A K 3 2
♥ J 10 4
♦ K 3
♣ 8 6 4

Whilst the ♦K is tempting, there is no need to try leading it immediately. (This is NOT a hand for leading a trump, despite the three suits having been bid, because East has rebid a suit – which seems rather 'threatening' in terms of tricks.) I led the ♠A, asking for attitude. Partner played the ♠10 discouraging, but now I had time to see dummy:

Me
♠ A K 3 2
♥ J 10 4
♦ K 3
♣ 8 6 4

Dummy
♠ J 5
♥ Q 2
♦ Q J 6
♣ A Q J 7 5 3

It was safe to continue with another spade and I was confident that, on the ♠K, partner would give me a suit preference signal, to help me with my switch. After all, she had at least 3 spades, so could choose which spade to play on this lead. She played the ♠9. Now it was easy to continue with the ♦K and another diamond to partner's Ace. A third diamond now promoted my ♥J into a second undertrick.

This hand was obviously a 'when to break the rules' hand instead. It goes to show that, whilst general rules or guidelines are great, you still have to listen to the auction!

Keep working together with your partner to make defending a pleasure rather than an arduous task!

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