

Active or Passive Opening Leads

Only The Auction Can Tell You

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There are critical elements that need to be considered before an opening lead against a suit contract is made:

You must **analyze** the auction. This is most revealing. More later.

You must **rate the table**. Counting the High Card Points and potential tricks in your hand is critical. Does partner rate to hold tricks or not?

Did the bidding reveal a potential **weakness**?

Did **partner** bid?

Try to **imagine** each hand as the bidding progresses.

Consider a defense that might **defeat** the contract.

Did they look for **slam** and bid it?

Did they look for slam and **stop** short?

What hand **shape** was revealed during the bidding?

The natural advantage declarer has in a no trump contract if he opened 1NT is that he has a big hand, and the lead is often coming up to his AQx and KJx tenaces. A tenace is a broken sequence. Sometimes a “give away” is unavoidable, but you can minimize your exposure in four ways.

First, don’t make speculative “bizarre” leads that are long shots in the hopes of finding partner with specific cards that s/he is not likely to hold. This is sure to put a smile on declarer’s face.

Second, look at the hand and ask yourself what other players are going to lead from the mess you are looking at. Even if the lead turns out to be awful, if everybody else makes the same choice, you get an average result. This technique is referred to by some as “swimming with the fishes” and works quite effectively.

Third, analyze the auction! If declarer has bid a suit, do not lead that suit unless you own it. Leading a suit bid by the dummy is good if you hold quality in the suit. If partner bid, consider leading that suit. If you choose to lead it, lead your highest card in the suit if you have **not** supported. Lead low from interest if you have it.

Fourth, honor leads in no trump are common and almost invariably they are from a sequence of honors or a broken sequence (KQTx). Try to remember that KQ108 is a broken sequence. KQxx is not. Do **NOT** lead this suit if Declarer has bid it.

What do you do if you hold two honors but they are not in a sequence such as AQxx or KJxx. Try to remember that most of the time, the **Declarer** has the majority of missing honors.

I am sure you can remember a time when opponents bid a no trump game without a stopper in a particular suit and partner held those key cards. Try to remember that bridge is a game of percentages and that you want to develop a habit of making leads, and plays that will work **most** of the time. Under leading a tenace at no trump is a long term loser. Equally unappealing is leading either honor. You want this suit led by your partner and through declarer, and you need to develop patience and have confidence that partner will make the lead. If partner does not have an entry, this defense is not going anywhere anyway. Even if partner cannot or does not lead this suit, it is better to **force declarer to break the suit**.

Well, after all that advice you may still decide you must choose between two suits that look like this: KJxx or AQxx. By all means lead small from the KJxx, a far superior lead than from AQxx. The reason: If you lead small from KJxx there are **two** cards that can protect you, the A or Q. When you lead from AQxx, there is only **one** card partner can hold to avoid disaster, the King. So the odds are 2:1 by way of comparison.

Other than honor sequence leads, when defending no trump contracts, generally stay with the time honored rule of 4th best from the longest and strongest. First, you are not likely to defeat a no trump contract by your preponderance of high card points. It is not Aces and Kings that doom most no trump contracts, it's the 2's, 3's and 4's in that long suit you were able to develop before declarer got 9 tricks. So you need to get started on that right away. Second, when you lead 4th best, partner can employ the Rule of 11 and obtain some idea of declarer's holding. I follow this rule pretty religiously if I have a 5+ card suit. Experience has taught me that leading from 4th best when you only have **4 cards** in the suit **headed by a single subordinate honor** (Queen or Jack) often gives away more tricks than it gains. Look for something else.

If you don't have any entries back to your hand after your opening lead, it is pointless to work on your suit, it will never materialize. When I have that kind of hand, I try to lead something that looks like it might help my partner, often an unbid major. If the bidding has gone 1NT/3NT, it sounds like opponents do not have an interest in majors. Since they lack interest in majors, that should be where our interest lies. Make sure to lead **low from interest** if you have an honor, **top of nothing** if not.

If partner has bid a suit, and the opponents bid a NT contract right in her face, you have a tough decision. I generally lead partner's suit, even if I have a singleton. **Better to lose a board than to lose a partner**. If I have bid a suit and they bid a NT next, if I am on lead I will generally – lead my suit unless I have an honor sequence of some kind. Without a sequence, it is better to hope that

partner can get the lead and send my suit through declarer. So, the fact that I did not lead my bid suit does not indicate **lack of interest** in the suit, I just don't want to lead it up to declarer. Do not forget that a sequence is 3 touching cards.

Famous Last Words: *We would have set the contract if you had led my suit!*

Here are some Do's and Don'ts:

If partner doubles an artificial bid, it is **lead directing**.

If partner doubles for takeout and they end up in NT, lead low from **interest** in one of partner's known suits even if you hold 3 cards in that suit.

If partner doubles the final 3NT contract but neither of you has bid, **lead Dummy's first bid suit**.

If partner doubles the final 3NT contract and has bid a suit, **lead partner's suit**.

If both you and your partner have **both** bid and the opponents end up in 3NT, if partner doubles, **lead partner's suit**.

Don't lead a suit into the declarer unless you **own** the suit.

Don't lead Aces or other high honors that are **unsupported**, unless partner has bid the suit.

Don't try to find partner when you **know** s/he isn't there. The bidding went 1NT – 3NT. You are on lead with a near opening hand. Lead top of nothing.

If you choose to lead the **unbid major** because the auction suggest that you should lead it, lead **low from interest, high from nothing**. Partner will know whether or not to return the suit whenever s/he gets in.

Unless you are strongly convinced otherwise, **return Dummy's weakest suit** when you get on lead.

When the opponents bid strongly and confidently and end up in game, your lead should be **ACTIVE**. When they limp along and end up somewhere, they might not belong or in a partial, your lead should be **PASSIVE**.

Active leads are made from honor holdings and hope to cash tricks before the Declarer can make the contract. Opponents bid confidently to 4♠. 1♠ – 2♠ – 4♠ P P P. You hold

♠xx ♥KQxx ♦Axx ♣xxxx

Lead the ♥K, an active lead.

Passive leads are Trump, Top of Nothing or Top of Sequence. The opponents reach 3NT with no apparent misgivings. You have a near opening hand and you know that partner is broke. Make a passive lead.

♠KJx ♥QJxx ♦AQx ♣986

Lead the ♣9, a passive lead. ♣