

Initial thoughts by defenders after the auction

Three issues are paramount for defenders, initially when the auction is over, and then subsequently, when dummy goes down and then during the play.

1) How many points has partner got

Add yours to what you think they have got, and take the result away from 40. Occasionally, partner's points will appear early in the play eg supposing you know that partner has 6 points, and she leads the King of Clubs against a no-trump contract. She must have KQJx(x) in the club suit and therefore can have no more points elsewhere.

If no honours have appeared with only four or five tricks remaining, you will be much clearer as to exactly where these points are. The problem here lies in *remembering* partner's likely point count *throughout the play*, when you have all the other aspects of the play going through your mind.

S A2	After 1NT-2NT-Pass, opponents have 23 points so partner has 10 points.
H K9762	
D 963	
C 842	

S A32	After 1NT-3NT by opponents (effectively cutting you out), you know that partner has no interest in this hand.
H A96	
D A432	
C Q97	

2) What is declarer's plan?

If you can judge declarer's likely line of play, you must try and stop it. Two common scenarios are:-

- (a) shortage in dummy where you must try and prevent ruffs by leading trumps
- (b) long suit in dummy to which you must try and deny access

S 3 2	After 1S-1NT-2H- pass (by opponents), this disparity between hearts and spades in dummy is marked. To prevent ruffing in dummy, you must lead trumps.
H 7 3 2	
D A 6 5 4	
C K 6 5 4	

S A62	Dummy's diamonds here threaten to take a lot of tricks, irrespective of the contract. The Ace of diamonds must be held up, and the Ace of Spades must be taken out of dummy early on.
H 32	
D KQJ32	
C 973	

3) Do I need to be active or passive when on lead ?

You can be active if you have a plan of your own (lead a shortage in a trump contract, or continue with partner's suit in a no-trump contract [etc,etc](#)), or if you are trying to counter declarer's plan. With no obvious reason to be active, you will be passive ie give declarer a trick she would make anyway, don't rush to open up new suits [etc,etc](#) .

S 97654	This is dummy after a simple auction 1S-4S. You have won the first trick with the Ace of clubs, and are on lead at trick two. A diamond lead would be passive, while a heart lead is active, hoping for K or KJ in partner's hand. A club lead would also be active here (if rather pedestrian), seeking to find the reason for partner's choice of the opening lead of a club.
H AQ32	
D AK	
C 3	

Passive opening leads against trump contracts

Passive leads are greatly undervalued by novice players. Experienced players have learnt to their cost that leading a suit in which declarer is sure to take a trick is doing no harm and is often preferable to an active or attacking lead which may give tricks away if the lie of the cards is unfavourable.

Generally speaking, the opening lead should be active, if you have one. Note carefully the list of [opening leads against trump contracts and the mnemonic for remembering them](#). Unfortunately, on many occasions we do not have a lead that qualifies as active, and so we must fall back on a passive one. Sadly, they are not easy to find.

The best passive lead is, without doubt, a small trump, although this goes against the grain in the early stages of learning the game, as the tendency is to think that the trump suit 'belongs' to the opposition. Sure, it does, and this is why it is such a safe lead since most of the time, declarer has the majority of the high cards in this suit and you are simply giving her a trick she would make anyway, thus avoiding a mistake.

The second best passive lead is the top of a sequence-even a two-card sequence may be good enough. This is halfway towards being active anyway, as it is paving the way for a trick in this suit.

KQ 5 , QJ 3 2 , A K 4 3 , QJ 9 6 etc.

Failing these two, a small card from a four or five card suit, or longer, is liable to be harmless, even if the suit is headed by an honour, as someone will be short.

Leading a suit headed by an ace, such as **A 4 3 2** , **A 7 5** , etc is bad since the lead of the ace will capture nothing while underleading it may give away a trick to a singleton honour and later on, your ace only catches fresh air.

To summarise, then, passive leads against trump contracts are:

1. A trump
2. Top of a sequence
3. A small card from a long suit *not* headed by an ace.

S J 6 2		Lead a small trump to any trump contract.
H Q 4 3		
D 6 5 4 3		
C K 9 7		

S Q J 10		The queen of spades lead paves the way for a spade trick, and half-qualifies as passive.
H K 7 3		
D 9 5 4		
C 6 5 4 3		

S J 9 7 5 4 3		The lead of a small spade is liable to do the least damage against a club, diamond or heart contract.
H Q 3 2		
D K 2		
C 5 4		

Active leads against trump contracts

In a trump contract, active leads may be classified as:-

- A singleton
- A doubleton
- A long suit, hoping for a shortage in partners' hand
- A trump if we think that dummy has ruffing potential
- A long, strong suit which forces declarer to ruff in her own hand
- Partner's suit

You may find it helpful to remember these through the initial letters of the sentence

Sensible Defenders Like To Lead Positively

I am greatly indebted to my friend John Elven for devising this mnemonic.

Examples: In every example that follows, spades are trumps. The six examples illustrate, in order, the six active leads above.

S 543	
H 2	
D A5432	
C Q862	
The singleton heart will give you a ruff, if partner is able to gain the lead early in the game. Partner will need a few points.	
S A 3 2	
H 8 2	
D 9 7 5 4	
C K 8 6 2	
Your doubleton heart will give you a ruff if you can get partner on lead early enough. Your Ace of spades will help here. Partner will need a few points.	
S 864	
H 32	
D A98643	
C Q7	
Lead the Ace of your long suit. Someone is short and you hope it is your partner, who will get a ruff now or later.	
S 432	
H Q752	
D Q86	
C K32	
Lead a trump, if dummy has shortages. At worst it may prove to be a good passive lead.	
S 54	
H AKQ83	
D 762	
C K98	
Lead your hearts from the top, in the hope that declarer has to ruff in her own hand. This is the forcing defence.	
S 654	
H Q73	
D J2	
C A8654	
Assuming your partner has bid diamonds, lead the Jack. The peter will show a doubleton.	