

LEAD TIPS

By Eddie Kantar

LEADS VS. DOUBLED CONTRACTS

When partner doubles the final contract, partner either:

1. Thinks that the combined defensive strength between the two defensive hands is enough to defeat the contract.
2. Has a strong trump holding.
3. Can tell from the bidding that it is a touch and go contract and that you have trump length. The double is an effort to give declarer a false impression of who has the missing trump. These are called "offside" doubles and also require a special relationship with partner when they don't work.
4. Is trying to direct your lead to a particular suit, a suit you might not otherwise have led. These "lead directing" doubles apply vs. slam contracts or when partner has preempted. When partner makes a penalty double, assume partner is short in your long suit. Penalty doubles work best when the doubling side is misfitted.

LEADS VS. DOUBLED SLAM CONTRACTS

If partner has bid and later doubles a VOLUNTARILY bid slam, do NOT lead partner's suit (the normal lead) and do NOT lead a trump. Partner's double shows either:

1. A void (the most common reason).
2. A desire for a lead in dummy's first bid suit.
3. The AK of one of the declarer's bid suits.
4. If partner has NOT bid and later doubles a VOLUNTARILY bid slam, do not lead the unbid suit. (That is the normal lead).

Partner's double shows either:

1. A side suit void
2. A desire for the lead in dummy's first bid suit.

LEADING VS. A SLAM WHEN THERE IS NO DOUBLE TO HELP YOU OUT

If dummy makes a wild leap to slam (no Blackwood), assume a void, strong trump, a long powerful side suit and a likely control in the shorter side suit. It is usually right to lead that shorter side suit.

North	East	South	West (you)
1H	Pass	1S	2C

6S !!

You hold S. A43 H. Q5 D. J64 C. AQJ95

Dummy certainly has a club void with a long heart suit. Lead a diamond and hope to build up a trick in that suit before your SA is removed.

LEADING PARTNER'S SUIT

- With a weak hand and Qxxx(x) or Kxxx(x) lead the honor in case you need to switch to another suit. If you lead low, you may never get in again.
- With the ace and any length, lead the ace unless you feel you must get partner in at once to: (1) give you a ruff; (2) lead a suit through declarer before another suit can be established. Underleads of aces when they don't work out require a very special relationship with partner.
- With 10xx, Jxx, or Qxx lead low. However if dummy has bid notrump, lead the high honor.
- With three or four small, lead low if you have NOT supported; high if you have.
- If you have led high from xxx, play your middle card next. If you have led high from xxxx, play your lowest card next. If you have led low from xxx, play your highest card next. If you have led low from xxxx, play your lowest card next.
- Leading a suit partner has overcalled is USUALLY safer than leading a suit partner has opened. However, if the bidding has indicated that partner has made a light third hand opening, tend to lead partner's suit. One reason for opening light is third seat is to attract the lead.

THE OPENING LEAD (vs Suit)

The card you select as your opening lead is probably the most important card you are going to play during the entire defense. Therefore, you should give it a little thought. Your focus should be on the likely distribution around the table (easier when there is plenty of bidding), declarer's likely strength and the degree of trump fit that the bidding seems to indicate.

Of major concern is this whether you should be making an aggressive or passive opening lead. Again you must go back to the bidding to help you out.

- Does the dummy figure to have a long side suit?
- If there is a long side suit, how is it breaking?
- Should I be looking to ruff?
- Should I be looking to give partner a ruff?
- Should I be trying to shorten the declarer?
- Should I just be sitting back and waiting for tricks rather than attacking here, there, and everywhere?
- Should I be leading a trump to cut down on ruffs in the dummy?

These are some of the questions you should be asking yourself before you make your opening lead.

WARM UP TIPS

1. Never, but never forget you are playing with a partner. It pays to consider what things may look like from partner's point of view, particularly when you are privy to some information that partner isn't.
2. You cannot defend properly unless you remember the bidding.
3. You cannot defend properly unless you know what system the opponents are playing.
4. You cannot defend properly unless you watch the cards, particularly the little fellows.
5. You cannot defend properly unless you count.
6. You cannot expect your partner to defend properly if you make faces or show other signs of disapproval.
7. Keep one goal in mind: DEFEATING THE CONTRACT. Do not worry about overtricks unless you are defending a doubled contract or are playing tournament bridge.
8. A player who hesitates during the bidding is likely to have a problem hand. If that player becomes the declarer, keep the hesitation in mind.
9. The figure to focus on during the defense is the number of tricks you need at any given moment to defeat the contract. Defense is based on this figure.
10. Give your opening lead a little consideration. The fate of many a contract is determined by that one card. Use the bidding as a guide.
11. Make sure you and your partner are on the same wave length concerning leads and signaling conventions.
12. Don't compound a crime. If you, or more likely partner, have made an error, do not lose your cool. Many contracts can still be beaten after one defensive error, seldom after TWO.
13. If partner makes a nice play, a kind word or two at the end of the hand goes a long way.
14. The speed of the play, may be a clue to declarer's problem. When playing a 4-3 trump fit, play usually slows to a crawl.
15. When two possible defenses present themselves to defeat the contract, both equally likely, select the simpler. (Unless you are looking to make an appearance in a newspaper column.)
16. If you can see the winning defense, take charge. Don't put any additional pressure on partner if you don't have to.
17. Keep partner's skill level in mind. Lead a poor player by the hand.
18. Watch partner's spot card signals. The stronger your partner, the more meaningful they are.
19. Keep your singletons and doubletons in the middle of your hand. Some players watch where your cards come from.
20. Try not to guard against non-existent dangers; guard only against those that are consistent with the bidding and play.
21. Try to put yourself in declarer's shoes. If you can discern her fears, play on those fear though they may not exist.
22. Don't even think of leading a trump when the opponents are in the throes of a misfit.
23. Holding a balanced hand with broken strength in each suit, a trump lead from two or three small when dummy has given a single raise is usually best.
24. Avoid leading a singleton trump unless partner has passed a one level takeout double announcing a strong trump holding. If she has, a trump lead is mandatory.
25. If partner is marked with a singleton trump, there is no point in leading a trump from Kxx because neither of you will be able to continue the suit. Try another lead and hope that partner will find the trump switch, if necessary.