

OPENING LEADS: Bruce Greenspan 617-510-8405 greenspanbridge@yahoo.com

At the outset, the most important thing you can do to improve your leads is to simply think about them as the bidding proceeds and practice the correct line of defense. There are 5 lines of defense:

1. Forcing defense: Force declarer to ruff early and often in his own hand, forcing him to lose control of the trump suit. Conditions for the forcing defense: declarer has a 2 suiter, anytime you have 4 trumps or believe partner does, 4-3 trump contracts, anytime the long trump hand can be forced early.

2. Active defense: The important thing to remember about active defense is that usually you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. You take risks because you know tricks are going to disappear if you are passive. Conditions for active defense: Any time tricks can go away. Declarer's side suit is breaking. Vigorous bidding (slam interest). Long running suits (e.g. Gambling 3nt).

3. Passive defense: There are a number of conditions to remain passive. If one of these exist, do not break open new suits, do not snatch tricks, sit back and wait for your tricks. When you are on lead in this case, choose worthless suits or top of sequences. Conditions for passive defense: no evidence of a strong side suit. Declarer very strong, dummy weak. A misfit or bad split in key suits. No real suit to lead against no-trump or knowing partner has little to contribute. Defending 6nt and grand slams. Usually, the defender can tell from the bidding and his cards that no side suit exists, or if one exists it is breaking badly or there is no entry in dummy for the side suit. If a misfit exists in a side suit or you have strength in declarer's second suit, a trump lead is usually beneficial. In addition, against no-trump be wary of leading a 4 card suit with only 1 honor.

4. Lead trump to cut down declarer's ruffing power. If the bidding by the opponents lands in a secondary suit, a trump lead is almost mandatory i.e. 1 s -1nt-2c all pass; lead a club. If you are strong in other suits, a trump lead is indicated. Another good time to lead a trump is when your side has a trump stack. You don't want dummy to be able to ruff with 1 or 2 trump. Another good time to lead trump is when the opponents are sacrificing.

5. Creating trump tricks: Leading singleton's may not be the best lead, but the weaker your hand the better the lead. If you have length in the trump suit and a singleton, the forcing defense is better. If you are long in a secondary suit bid by both dummy and declarer, you may be able to create ruffs for partner.

Sometimes partner can help with the opening lead. Any double of an artificial bid is lead directing. Stayman, transfers, cuebids, blackwood responses and all other artificial or conventional bids may be doubled for lead directing purposes.

Special leads: If opponents end up in 3 nt without competition and partner doubles, it asks you to lead dummy's first bid suit. If the opponents bid slam and partner doubles (Lightner double), it asks for an unusual lead, normally dummy's first bid suit.

In general, the choice of cards you lead against notrump or suit contracts is generally the same. The major difference is when you have a 2 card sequence to lead from. With QJ73 of a suit, you would lead the queen against a suit contract. Against notrump, lead your lowest. Curiously, if you have a holding such as AK753, you would lead the ace against a suit contract. With no outside entry, 4th best is better in most cases.

1. S: 865	N	E	S	W
H: KJ5	1NT	P	3NT	P
D: AQ3				
C: KJ53				

What do you lead?

2. You hold:	N	E	S	W
S: 873	P	P	1NT	P
H: K10742	2C	P	2S	P
D: void	2NT	P	P	P
C: K8632				

What do you lead?

3. You hold:	N	E	S	W
S: Q6542	3D	P	3NT	all pass
H: J754				
D: 8				
C: AK3				

4. S: J10	N	E	S	W
H: K753	1H	P	2H	P
D: KJ954	4H			
C: 82				

5. S: Q1053	N	E	S	W
H: J1098	1NT	P	2C	P
D: 6	2H	P	4H	P
C: A952				

6. S: 9642	N	E	S	W
H: 842	1NT	P	2C	P
D: 6	2H	P	4H	P
C: J9743				

7. S: A764	N	E	S	W
H: 65	1NT	P	2C	P
D: K963	2H	P	3H	P
C: Q64	4H	P		

8. S: QJ10	N	E	S	W
H: A743	1H	P	1NT	P
D: K532	2C	all pass		
C: 87				

What do you lead?