

DEFENSIVE PLAY OF THE HAND

LESSON 10-B

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Leads against No Trump Contracts: Opening leads can make or break either declarer or the defense. Unfortunately, the card selection must come before the dummy has been tabled. Even without seeing the dummy, however, the opening lead can be selected, both as to the best suit and the actual specific card within that suit, based upon preferential standard guidelines for opening leads.

1. 1. **Choosing the Proper Suit:** One of the most well-known maxims in leading against a No Trump contract is to lead **fourth highest from one's longest and strongest suit holding**. Although this is generally a good idea, it must be exercised at the right time and place, and is not always the most appropriate lead. Many times, the bidding itself can, will, and indeed, should influence one's choice. If partner has bid, his/her suit is likely to be the most productive of the possible choices, especially if it represents the defending teams longest combined suit holding. Finally, the level of the final contract may, and, oft times, does influence the selection for the best card to lead. Which card from the following example hand should a defender lead against a No Trump contract under each of the listed conditions?

EXERCISE 1

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 109762 | 1) The contract is 3NT and your partner has bid Hearts. |
| 86 | 2) The contract is 1NT and no bidding on your side has occurred. |
| A943 | 3) The contract is 3NT after one of the opponents opened 1 Spade. |
| KQ | 4) The contract is 6NT. |

- 1) 1) 8 Hearts 2) 10 Spades 3) 3 Diamonds 4) K Clubs

Conclusion: The opening lead is defender's chance to get a head start in establishing winners in order to either defeat the specified contract or to minimize the number of overtricks to which declarer is entitled. It is critical to start with the suit offering the greatest potential for your side. One must pick from a suit bid by either or both defenders, longest and strongest from amongst the suits not bid by the opponents, or from tricks easily seen as being winners.

2. 2. **Choosing the Card in Partner's Suit:** Once a defender has selected the specific suit from which to lead, the actual card from within that suit must be chosen. This specific selection is important for two reasons. (A) The disadvantageous fact that the defenders cannot see each others hands must be overcome as quickly as is possible. Thus, they must send each other messages about their hands by means of the specific cards they choose to play beginning with the opening lead. (B) They must facilitate and maximize the opportunity of taking the maximum number of tricks to which they might be entitled. In each of the following hands, you are leading your partners bid suit. Which is the best card to lead and why?

EXERCISE 2

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1) 1) | <u>DUMMY</u> | 2) | <u>DUMMY</u> | 3) | <u>DUMMY</u> |
| <u>YOU</u> | 962 | <u>YOU</u> | K85 | <u>YOU</u> | 96 |
| <u>J3</u> | <u>PARTNER</u> | <u>QJ3</u> | <u>PARTNER</u> | <u>Q75</u> | <u>PARTNER</u> |
| | KQ875 | | A10962 | | A10842 |
| <u>DECLARER</u> | | <u>DECLARER</u> | | <u>DECLARER</u> | |
| A104 | | 74 | | KJ3 | |

In 1), you should lead the Jack, the **top of a doubleton**. You are essentially starting the suit by playing the high card from two from the short side.

In 2), the Queen is the choice, **the top of touching cards** in partner's suit. This tells partner that you do not have the next higher card but do have the next lower, unless you are leading from a doubleton. The lead of the Queen will trap dummy's King. If you had alternatively led the 3, Partner could win the first trick with the ten, but would be incapable of trapping the King from Dummy unless partner can get back to you hand, and this is not always possible.

In 3), the 5 is the preferred choice, **lowest from three or more cards headed by a non-touching honor**. Partner can win the Ace and then lead back through declarer's K-J promoting your Queen. If you were to have led the Queen, declarer would have gotten two tricks, one with the King and one with the Jack.

Conclusion: When leading partner's suit, one should choose the top of a doubleton, the top of touching honors, or low from three or more card headed by an honor.

3. 3. **Leading the Top of a Sequence:** When leading against a No Trump contract under circumstances where partner has not bid, and no further information about the Opponent's suits is available, you choose your longest suit. One normally leads the **fourth best** unless one of the following holdings exists. If the suit has a **3-card or longer sequence, you lead the top card** (J109X, QJ10X, etc.). If you hold a **broken sequence**, a sequence of two touching cards with a lower ranking card following a break in the sequence, (QJ9, J108, KQ10, 875, etc.) you lead **the top of the two touching cards from the broken sequence**. If you hold an **internal sequence**, a sequence of two or more touching cards with a higher ranking card in the suit (AQJX, KJ10X, Q109X, 10876, etc.) you lead **the top of the two or more touching cards**. In the following examples, you are leading your own suit against a No Trump contract. Which is the best card to lead, and how many tricks can the defense develop? What must the defense do to ensure they take their maximum number of tricks?

EXERCISE 3

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|--|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----|--|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------|--|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----|--|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------|
| <p>1) <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DUMMY</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">YOU K3 PARTNER</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">J1096 A752</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">Q84</td></tr> </table></p> | <u>DUMMY</u> | YOU K3 PARTNER | J1096 A752 | <u>DECLARER</u> | Q84 | <p>2) <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DUMMY</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">YOU A7 PARTNER</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">QJ963 842</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">K105</td></tr> </table></p> | <u>DUMMY</u> | YOU A7 PARTNER | QJ963 842 | <u>DECLARER</u> | K105 | <p>3) <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DUMMY</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">YOU K2 PARTNER</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">AJ1043 876</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">Q95</td></tr> </table></p> | <u>DUMMY</u> | YOU K2 PARTNER | AJ1043 876 | <u>DECLARER</u> | Q95 | <p>4) <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DUMMY</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">YOU 74 PARTNER</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">KQJ83 A62</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">1095</td></tr> </table></p> | <u>DUMMY</u> | YOU 74 PARTNER | KQJ83 A62 | <u>DECLARER</u> | 1095 |
| <u>DUMMY</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| YOU K3 PARTNER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| J1096 A752 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DECLARER</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Q84 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DUMMY</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| YOU A7 PARTNER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| QJ963 842 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DECLARER</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| K105 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DUMMY</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| YOU K2 PARTNER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AJ1043 876 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DECLARER</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Q95 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DUMMY</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| YOU 74 PARTNER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| KQJ83 A62 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <u>DECLARER</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1095 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1) Jack; 3 | 2) Queen; 3 | 3) Jack; 4 | 4) King; 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Conclusion: When you are leading your own suit or an unbid suit, your first preference is to lead the **top of a sequence**, or the **top of a broken sequence**, or the **inside top of an interior sequence**.

4. 4. **Leading a Low Card:** When you look at your long suit, you may not have a long, a broken, or even an internal sequence within the suit that you desire to lead. Instead, you have a suit containing one, or even two, honors not in sequence. You will likely require some help from partner in order to establish winners in the suit, and so the best opportunity will develop if you **lead a low card** over to the hoped-for high card(s) of partner. In the following suit holdings, and once again, against a No

KJ43
98

J109
J8

Q83
KQJ10

AJ108
862

KQ109
853

Conclusion: If the opponents have bid a suit in the auction on their path towards a final No Trump contract, it is generally a good idea to avoid leading it if you have a constructive alternative. Paying close attention to the bids made by the opponents often can guide you to the best and most likely productive opening lead.