

PICKING THE RIGHT SUIT TO LEAD AGAINST NO TRUMP by Maritha Pottenger (rev.2020)

If partner has bid, it is usually right to lead partner's suit. Particularly, if partner has overcalled, that generally shows a good suit and asks you to lead it. If partner opened a minor, leading his/her suit is less likely to be imperative. **When you have a weak hand, lead partner's suit—s/he has the entries!**

If partner has opened in 3rd seat, partner is more likely to open a strong suit (even a 4-card suit) to help direct you to the right lead.

If partner doubles an artificial bid, that demands the lead of the artificial suit. Similarly, if partner had an opportunity to double an artificial bid—and did not—(such as a 2C Stayman inquiry), it is less likely that suit is partner's suit.

On auctions that go 1NT-P-3NT or where Declarer has denied majors (with Stayman inquiry), there is a strong statistical bias toward **leading a major for success. Your shorter major is likely to be partner's longer major**, so try to hit partner's suit, especially when you have a weak hand.

If you have a weak 5-card suit and a strong 4-card suit, it is generally better to lead the strong 4-card suit. If you have two suits of equal length, but one is stronger, it is generally better to lead the stronger one as it will be easier to establish.

If you have two suits of about equal strength, it is generally better to lead the unbid major than an unbid minor. Remember, sometime a major is bid by inference! If it goes 1NT on your right, 2C on your left, 2H on your right and 3NT on your left, then RHO has hearts and LHO has spades. Probably best to try a minor suit if you have length, or lead spades if you are short as partner has spades behind dummy.

If you have two suits of about equal strength (and length), but one is headed by the Ace, it is generally better to lead the other suit. (The Ace in your second suit will be a useful entry.)

When bidding suggests that dummy has a long, strong suit to run, it may be advisable to lead from a strong holding in a short suit to guarantee that your side gets 1 or 2 tricks. (For example, you might lead from AKx or KQx rather than something like Jxxxx.)

If your long suit is pitiful and your hand is anemic, try to identify what suit partner might have and lead that. (Remember, if partner had an opportunity to make a 1-level overcall and did NOT, that is probably not the suit.)

If you elect to lead a poor 4-card suit, lead second-highest. Low would promise an honor. Lead the top card from 8xxx or worse. If your top card is a 9 or 10, lead second highest (7 from (9752)). That way, partner knows it is OK to shift suits.

Leading from the **AQxx combination** will often blow a trick you don't get back. (Consider top of nothing in another suit, although you may end up going with 4th best from AQxx.) Leading from **AQxxx** may blow a trick, but you expect 4 in return, so it is usually worth the risk.

When leading against 6NT, make the safest possible lead (top of a sequence or top of nothing). Do NOT lead away from honors in your hand.

Sometimes you feel it is important to lead a suit that one of your opponents has bid. Usually you will NOT lead the suit bid on your right—wait for Declarer to have to come to you with tenace holdings such as AQxx or KJxx(x). If you have 4 or 5 cards & **good spot cards e.g., QJ109 or AJ109** in the (4-card) suit bid on your right, it is OK to lead that suit as your honors will be well placed behind the bidder when partner returns the suit. If the suit was bid on your left, you probably don't want to lead it unless you have a safe, solid sequence. However, if the suit bid on your left promised only 4 cards, and you have only 2, and Declarer has denied a fit,

partner should have 4 or 5 cards in that suit and his/her honors will be well-placed behind Dummy's honors. That suit is often right to lead—or Dummy's second (4-card) suit when partner is likely to hold 4 or more cards in that suit behind Dummy.