

## Opening Leads: Ideas, Laws, and Etiquette

We all hate being on opening lead when the bidding has given no clue of what to do and we don't hold any of those safe KQJ-sort of combinations. There are other issues at hand, however, when it comes to opening leads, and this week we will be looking at some things dealing with laws and time management as well as some suggestions about leads in specific situations.

The new ACBL rules now mandate rather than suggest face down opening leads to cut down on the number of lead-out-of-turn infractions. Even with bidding boxes in widespread use, players lose track of whose lead it is. (Should we try once more the procedure of leaving the bidding cards on the table until after the opening lead is made? Think about it and let us know.) Please try from now on to remember to place your card face down on the table and say something along the lines of "Questions?" or "Ready?" before turning it over. This will give the other players time to prevent a lead out of turn if you are *not* the actual opening leader.

To keep the game moving, make your opening lead before writing the contract, etc., in your scorecard. That way, declarer and partner can do their thinking after seeing dummy, while you do your bookwork and then look at dummy as well. Also, sometimes partner is tempted to lead out of turn when seeing you doing something other than considering your lead.

Now to some opening lead ideas. First, have an agreement with your partner as to a set of principles about which card to play in a suit. For example, if leading from three small cards, do you lead top, middle, or bottom? Second, unless you have an excellent reason to do otherwise, lead partner's suit when he/she has bid. It may not be brilliant, but it makes for a happier partner.

As to the rest of it—good luck! Volumes have been devoted to figuring out the best opening lead, and this column is not going to tackle the subject as a whole. Instead, let's consider three specific situations where the opening lead is dictated by the bidding.

The commonest of these involves leading trumps. You should make a trump lead when the bidding indicates that the declaring side is distributional and will make extra tricks by ruffing in dummy or through a cross-ruff. For example, if declarer has bid two suits and dummy prefers the second, a trump lead will probably be helpful. When shouldn't you lead trumps? When short in them yourself, you may be leading partner out of a trick. Also, if declarer has a side suit that is going to run, leading trumps simply improves the timing for him. It's no clear-cut situation, but the "low in strength, short in suits" guideline is one to keep in mind.

A less common opening lead principle comes when partner, silent throughout the auction, doubles a no trump contract. This always calls for you to lead dummy's first bid suit. Lead the highest card you hold in it, regardless of your length. See example 1 below.

Rarest of the lead rules is the Lightner double. While it is true that bidding disasters can occur, and slams are doubled when a defender has the setting tricks in hand regardless of any lead or line of play, it is generally not a good idea to double a slam. Therefore, when opponents bid freely to a slam and partner *does* double, an unusual lead is asked for. The double forbids you to lead trump, any suit you and your partner have bid, or any unbid suit you would lead without the double. Usually, partner wants to trump something and then cash an ace, or he has two cashing tricks in a suit if it is led immediately. Some partnerships play that this will always be, like with 3NT, a call for dummy's first bid suit. Others are more flexible. See example 2.

Example 1: The double of 3NT.

North (you)	East	South	West
-----	-----	Pass	1♣
Pass	1♠	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	DBL	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Here, South wants a spade lead. He should hold something like AKQ10x. If so, chances are excellent to set 3NT if you lead a spade right away.

Example 2: A slam double.

North (you)	East	South	West
-----	1♣	2♦ (weak)	2♥
Pass	2♠	Pass	3♠
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥
Pass	6♠	DBL	

You hold:

♠107 ♥108653 ♦J1098 ♣108

Partner is asking for a heart lead. You hold enough that he is void and is planning to trump a heart and, hopefully, cash one diamond trick (they didn't bid seven, so it sounds like they are off an ace).

Partner's hand:

♠432 ♥--- ♦AK5432 ♣5432

Remember—face down opening leads, bookwork second, and talk over ideas with partner. Good luck with your bridge this week and may all of your opening leads be contract killers (except against me!).