

## Opening Leads Against No-Trump Contracts

We will never get the opening lead right on every hand; we want to use the information we have from the auction to make an educated guess as to what is most likely to help our side, or at least, not hurt our side.

**First, we must choose the suit we want to lead; then, we pick the card in that suit.**

- (1) WHICH SUIT will we lead? Then,
- (2) WHICH CARD from that suit?

Did partner suggest a lead? It is very rarely wrong to lead partner's suit.

*If it isn't obvious to lead something else, it probably isn't right to lead something else!*

Which card in partner's suit?

- Lead the top of a doubleton, even if it is an honor.
- Lead the top of two or more cards in a sequence if the highest card is an honor.

With 3 or more non-sequential cards, it depends on whether or not you raised.

- If you raised partner, then BOSTON applies. You don't need to lead low to show 3, partner knows that already. Lead low to show an honor, lead high to deny one.

- If you didn't raise, ALWAYS lead low from three or more and high from a doubleton; partner needs to know your length.

If partner hasn't given us any advice on what to lead (thanks, partner), we should usually choose from the unbid suits.

- We tend to lead our longest suit
- We prefer a major to a minor.
- If we have a sequence, we may lead that, even if the opponents have bid the suit.
- With two five-card suits (neither bid by the opponents), lead the stronger one.
- With two four-card suits, tend to lead the stronger; however, with a "weak" strong holding such as AJxx, it may be safer to lead the other four-card suit, especially if it is headed by JT or T9
- If we lead an ace, partner is expected to unblock if they have the king, queen or jack; otherwise, give count, high from an even number and low from an odd number.
- If we lead a king, partner should give attitude. We want to know if we should continue from AKJx(x) or AKTx(x), perhaps.
- If we decide to lead a weak suit, and would prefer partner not continue when they get in, lead 2nd highest, not fourth-best.

**Board 2**

East Deals  
N-S Vul

♠ K Q 2 ♥ K 4 3 2 ♦ J 3 ♣ Q 10 7 3	♠ 8 7 6 3 ♥ A Q 9 8 ♦ 4 2 ♣ J 9 8	<div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; background-color: #008000; color: white; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span>N</span> <span>W</span> <span>E</span> <span>S</span> </div>	♠ 9 5 ♥ 7 6 ♦ A K Q 10 8 7 ♣ A K 4
	♠ A J 10 4 ♥ J 10 5 ♦ 9 6 5 ♣ 6 5 2		

West	North	East	South
		1 ♦	Pass
1 ♥	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

**Auction Commentary:** East has a great deal of playing strength with 8 probable top tricks. Their jump to 3 ♦ tells West they have a great hand. West has 11 HCP and at least one spade stopper so they try 3 NT.

**Opening Lead: 8♠**

Having heard the auction, North knows that an opening heart lead is unlikely to be a winner. It is often right to try the unbid major. Which spade should they lead? A fourth best lead tends to imply interest in the suit being returned. A high spot card implies no strength in the suit. This style is often referred to as using "attitude" leads, or BOSTON (Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing). We want partner to play hearts if they get in, not more spades.

**Third-Hand Play:** South will know that North has no spade strength and can place west with ♠KQ. Looking at the dummy, it is clear that the only hope for tricks is in the heart suit. South wins the ♠A and returns the ♥J. West is helpless, and the defense will take the first five tricks.

**Takeaway:**

This turned out to be a simple hand, but it is the beginning of the process of learning how to defend. We must be alert and willing to think. The tricks will follow.

On opening lead, we have to choose the right suit, and then, the right card in that suit. As partner, we have to pause and work out the implications of the opening lead in order to finish them off. If we simply play on auto-pilot, winning the ♠A and returning a spade, or if we lead our 4th best spade, rather than a high one, the declarer scampers home with 12 tricks instead of 8.

If you made a mistake on this hand, don't despair, learn from it, and get them next time!

**Board 5**

North Deals  
N-S Vul

<p>♠ Q 10 9 7 2 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ A J 2 ♣ 10 8</p>		<p>♠ K 6 4 ♥ K Q 2 ♦ 9 8 6 ♣ A K Q 7</p>	<p>♠ J 5 ♥ J 8 7 6 4 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ 9 5 2</p>
<p>♠ A 8 3 ♥ 10 5 ♦ K Q 10 4 ♣ J 6 4 3</p>			
<p><i>West</i></p>	<p><i>North</i> 1 NT</p>	<p><i>East</i> Pass</p>	<p><i>South</i> 3 NT</p>
<p>All pass</p>			

**Auction Commentary:** North has 15-17 HCP, and South's 10 HCP is enough to bid game directly.

**Opening Lead: J♠**

There are no guarantees in life, or in bridge. When we are on lead with a very weak hand, it will often be more effective to try and lead partner's best suit, rather than our own. How do we know what our partner's best suit is? See above about guarantees, but, we can make educated guesses based on the little we do know.

North opened 1 NT, so they probably have at most 4 spades. South did not use Stayman, so they probably have at most 3 spades. Since we have only 2 spades, it is nearly certain that partner has at least 4, and they could have more! We recommend leading the ♠ J with the East hand. If a heart would have been the winner, we can apologize, but if ♠ J is the winner, we will look brilliant. Such opportunities should be seized.

**Defensive Commentary:** West should play the ♠ Q, even if declarer calls for the Ace from dummy. Dummy's 8 will fall, making giving West a sequence. West wants spades to be continued and there is no need to make East guess if North ducks from both hands. West will get in again to set up the spades and then again to run them.

**Takeaway:** On another day, North will have one more spade and one fewer heart, and the ♠ J lead will be a disaster, while the ♥ 6 lead would allow an easy set. We need to remember not to place too much emphasis on the results; the thought process behind your actions are what is important. The right play can lead to failure, and the wrong play can lead to success, on any particular hand. We have to take the long view; if we make the best play consistently, we will have better overall results.

**Board 10**  
 East Deals  
 Both Vul

	♠ Q 7 6 5		
	♥ 9 5 4		
	♦ 9 6		
	♣ A 7 6 5		
♠ 10 9	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">             N              W     E              S           </div>	♠ K 4 3	
♥ Q 8 6		♥ A K 3	
♦ Q 10 4		♦ A K J 5	
♣ Q J 9 8 3		♣ K 10 4	
	♠ A J 8 2		
	♥ J 10 7 2		
	♦ 8 7 3 2		
	♣ 2		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		2 NT	Pass
3 NT	All pass		

**Auction Commentary:** If you play "Puppet" Stayman, West would bid 3♣ to check and see if East has 5 hearts. Otherwise, with 7 HCP, bidding 3NT is clear. Don't worry about weak spades, partner will have those covered -- (famous last words!).

**Opening Lead: J♥**

Fourth-best from our longest and strongest? It would be hard to fault Souths who led the ♠ 2 if they've been given this advice. There are reasons not to, however. A 2NT opener is more likely to have the missing high cards than a 1NT opener is. When we have ♠ AJ, we will often give up at least 1 trick unless partner has the ♠ K. When we have a sequence, even a tiny one like the ♥ JT, it gives us protection against giving up a trick. If our majors were five cards each, the spade lead is more attractive, because we now have a chance to beat the contract on the go when partner has ♠ Kx(x). With only four, it is probably better to be passive on opening lead and wait for partner to get in to lead spades from their side. Leading the ♥ J is our choice.

**Play Commentary:** Declarer has escaped a spade lead, good news for the moment. With 3 hearts and 4 diamonds, we obviously need to set up the clubs. If North falls asleep and doesn't take either of the first two clubs, East can run with their 9 tricks.

**Defensive Commentary:** There are times when North should hold up in clubs to make it difficult for East to run them, but this is not one of those times. The opening ♥ J lead marks declarer with the ♥ AK (Jack denies!). There is just enough room for South to hold the ♠ AJ. (We can count South to have started with either 6 or 7 HCP, and they have shown 1 HCP already.) So, we should shift to a spade. Did you lead a low spade and pat yourself on the back? Are we done thinking about this? What will declarer do with ♠ Kxx if we lead a low one? Duck! Partner can win the ♠ AJ, but that will be the end for the defense. What else can we do? Picture the effect of leading ♠ Q! If declarer ducks, you will still be on lead to play another spade. If they cover, partner will cash the ♠ J, and now that the ♠ T9 have fallen, if they have ♠ 8 and another, we have performed a miracle and set them! Being brilliant is just the result of hard work; you must envision a layout that will allow you to beat them, and then follow through.