

# DEFENCE VERSUS TRUMP SUIT CONTRACTS

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## DEFENCE

- Getting your defence off to a good start involves finding a good opening lead. That involves two skills:

- finding the most advantageous suit
- selecting the correct card from within that suit.

### (A) Picking the Correct Card for the Opening Lead:

- Basically, once you have decided to lead a suit, the card will be the same card against no-trump contracts and trump suit contracts - with three exceptions:

A K 7 6 5      Lead A vs suit, 6 vs NT  
K Q 7 5 3      Lead K vs suit, 5 vs NT (*vs. a suit contract, we would prefer not to lead this suit, since we do not have 3 cards in sequence*)  
A 7 6 3      Lead A vs suit, 3 vs NT (*not a good lead against a suit contract – pick a different suit to lead*)

**NOTE: It is okay to underlead an Ace against a No Trump contract but never against a trump suit contract.. You 'll be promising that you do NOT have the Ace if you lead the 3.**

### EXERCISE A:

Each of the boxes below represents a holding in the suit you have decided to lead. Circle the card you would lead against a SUIT contract		
K 6 4	A K 8 6 5	Q 6
A 7 6 3	K Q J 2	J 10 8 2
Q J 10 9	Q 8 7 4 3 2	A 7 2
K J 7 4	9 6 3	8 2

Answers on next page

**(B) SIGNALS****Common Sense Overrides All Rules !**

- If partner leads an honour card to a trick, the standard rules for signalling by the partner of the person leading are simple:

High spot card: Continue the suit -- I like your lead!

Low spot card I cannot help you with that suit – I suggest that you switch to another suit.

- If partner leads low, and dummy plays low, then third hand plays high. This is NOT a signal! You are following suit and trying to win a trick.
- When you play a low card, showing partner that you don't like her lead (thus asking partner to switch), you cannot tell her **which suit to switch to !** Partner must use the bidding, the cards in dummy and his hand to work this out. One card can only give one message.
- Think before you signal -- even if partner's lead has not worked out well, it may be better to stick with that suit than to create further damage with another suit.

Each of the boxes below represents a holding in the suit you have decided to lead. Circle the card you would lead against a SUIT contract		
K 6 <u>4</u>	<u>A</u> K 8 6 5	<u>Q</u> 6
<u>A</u> 7 6 3	<u>K</u> Q J 2	<u>J</u> 10 8 2
<u>Q</u> J 10 9	Q 8 7 <u>4</u> 3 2	<u>A</u> 7 2
K J 7 <u>4</u>	<u>9</u> 6 3	<u>8</u> 2

**SUMMARY OF LEADS:**

Top of a sequence is top of the list. It is without a doubt our favourite lead. It gives nothing away to the opponents and may help your side to win a trick.

If you do NOT have a sequence, then use B.O.S.T.O.N. This stands for Bottom Of Something or Top Of Nothing. e.g. K752 is bottom of something but 952 is top of nothing

**Don't forget: NEVER underlead an ace against a trump suit contract. If you MUST lead the suit, lead the Ace.**

**The High-Low Signal**

- Show a doubleton by playing high-low if you can win the third round of the suit by ruffing or by holding an equal honour to one that you know that partner holds. If partner leads the K, and dummy has the A, you would play the **7** from J 7 2 (you know when partner leads the K, she also has the Q, therefore you must encourage her in that suit) Some people call this a "come-on" signal.

- You should **NOT** signal a doubleton by playing the Q from QX when **partner leads the Ace**. The play of the Q under the Ace has a special meaning, which we will discuss later.
- You also signal high-low if you can top an unplayed honour in dummy.

*EX. Partner leads the J, Q is in dummy, you hold K 8 2. You would play the 8 if dummy does not cover with the Q.*

- DO NOT automatically hi-low with a doubleton: if you are unable to ruff, or don't wish to ruff, or prefer a switch to another suit, it may be better to play low-high than to ask partner to continue by playing high-low.

### THE HIGH - LOW SIGNAL AT WORK

- As West, you hold the following hand:

♠ A K J 9 4    ♥ Q            ♦ 10 9 4 2    ♣ A 5 2

- The auction proceeds as follows:

<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>W</u> (You)
		1♥	1♠
2♥	P	3♥	P
4♥	P	P	P

- You select as your lead the ♠ A. The following dummy occurs:

<u>DUMMY</u>	
♠	8 7
♥	9 6 5 4
♦	A Q
♣	J 7 6 4 3

<u>WEST (You)</u>	
♠	A K J 9 4
♥	Q
♦	10 9 4 2
♣	A 5 2

- You choose as your opening lead the ♠ A. Declarer plays the ♠ 7 from dummy and partner plays the ♠ 10. That signals to you that partner *wants* ♠ continued! You carry on with the ♠ K, on which partner plays the ♠ 4 -- a HIGH-LOW signal, which **demand**s that you play the suit again, Sam!
- You should trust your partner and play that third ♠, even though dummy has only 2 spades and can ruff as well. Partner saw the dummy too. You must assume that partner can **overruff** the dummy and lead that 3rd ♠. If partner (east) had only the ♥ 32, she must not signal high-low as she is unable to overruff the dummy.

## THE OPENING LEAD AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS - SELECTING A SUIT

- No suit exists in a vacuum - it is part of the entire hand. Likewise, each hand should be considered in relationship to the other three. This is hard when you are declarer but even tougher when you are defending. As opening leader, it is harder still, as you haven't seen the dummy. All you have to go by is:
  - **your 13 cards;**
  - **the bidding;**
  - **what your partner *hasn't* bid.**

### (A) Selecting a Suit

#### Some Questions to Ask Yourself as You Think About Your Opening Lead

- (1) **Has partner bid ?**  
*[If so, it is usually right to lead partner's suit. You would only fail to do so if you have a very good suit of your own.]* e.g. AKQ
  - (2) **Does dummy sound like it will have a long, strong suit upon which declarer can pitch losers ?** (*Your clue would be that dummy bid and rebid a suit strongly*)  
*[If so, you have no alternative but to "get busy" and set up tricks for your side before they disappear on the dummy's long suit.]*
- When making an attacking lead, **you may have to lead low from K x x x or Q x x x** (this is called "leading away from an honour or "bottom of something") - hoping to find partner with adjacent honours that can be set up before dummy's long suit is established.
  - Leading from a King ( e.g. Kxxx is preferable to leading from a Q or a J - Attacking with a suit such as Kxxx, you gain if partner has the A or Q. This is safer than leading away from a Q or J.
    - **NEVER lead A x x x** against a trump suit contract -- bottom of something applies ONLY to K x x x or Q x x x or J x x x . **Don't** lead the suit at all against a trump suit contract, BUT if you MUST lead the suit, then lead the Ace.
    - If there are *two* unbid suits, and you have the A in one of them, it is almost always right to lead the other suit. Remember that Aces were meant to capture kings and queens. If you *lead* an Ace when you don't have the king, you will capture only small cards and make *the opponent's kings and queens good immediately*. If you wait, you will often get to capture an honour with your ace.]

- 3) **Do either you or partner hold 4 trump ? Remember, if you are short in the enemy's trump suit, partner might have some length there !**

This is the time to launch a "forcing game", the idea of which is to force declarer to trump in her hand. If you force her to trump in her hand often enough, she may lose control of the hand. In this situation, when you have 4 of the opponents' trumps, lead the *longest suit in the combined defensive hands (i.e. your longest suit or if partner has bid, lead that suit as it will be long in partner's hand.)* The idea is that if your side has lots of cards in that suit, then likely declarer will be short and will have to trump often when you lead that suit. You will then end up with more trumps than declarer has. This is always a good thing!

☞ **YOU WILL BE LEADING THE SAME SUIT YOU WOULD LEAD AGAINST NO-TRUMP !!**

**(B) When are Short Suit Leads Best?**

- One situation in which a short suit lead will usually work well is when **you hold trump control, either the A or the K with two small trumps**. Look carefully at holdings such as **AXX or KXX** in trump, which suggest a short suit (i.e. a singleton or doubleton) lead.

- Note: *This type of lead usually works best when partner has bid, marking him with an entry and when you hold a stopper in trump and at least one extra trump.*

- **Singleton Leads**

The lead of a singleton works best if you have some hope that partner will have the Ace. When partner has said not a word, and you hold a couple of Aces and a King, partner is unlikely to have much in the way of high cards, when opponents have bid to game. Singleton leads may not work as well in this case, as the opponents would not bid game with so much out against them.

**To summarize,**

- the better your hand, the less chance there is of hurting declarer with a singleton lead, so try to think of an alternative;
- **the worse your hand, the rosier the prospect of a ruff**. Partner is more likely to have high cards (i.e. entries to her hand) She will be able to win the trick and lead it back.

**WARNING:**

*Do NOT look for a ruff if you already have a natural trump holding. A natural trump trick is a trump trick that can not be taken away from you, such as Q J 10. If you trump with this type of holding, you merely break even, since you were always scoring a trick with that suit. With Axx or Kxx, if you ruff, you promote an extra trick for your side.*

• **Doubleton Leads**

Doubleton leads are often the best leads on hands similar to those in which we would lead a singleton - a weakish hand with a short suit and 3 trump, usually headed by the **A** or **K**.

A good example of auctions where a doubleton may work well

N	E	S	W
1 ♠	P	2 ♥	P (You)
2 NT	P	4 ♥	All Pass

**Your hand:**     ♠ Kxxx   ♥ Axx   ♦ 10x   ♣ xxxx

*Lead the ♦ 10 - if you are lucky, partner will have the **A Q** sitting over the **K** in dummy. Dummy did bid no-trump, after all! Partner may have the **A**, in which case you are still OK. Even if partner has no such holding, you are playing through the strong hand and are unlikely to do any great harm.*

**How will partner recognize if your lead is a singleton or a doubleton?**

<u>DUMMY</u>		
	♠ A 10 x x x	
	♥ K x	
	♦ K Q 9	
	♣ Q x x	
<u>YOU</u>		<u>PARTNER</u>
♠ K x x x		♠ Q x x x
♥ A x x		♥ x x
♦ 10 x		♦ A 8 2
♣ x x x x		♣ K J x x

Let us run around the table and take partner's place. In our new seat, we find ourselves with

♠ Q x x x   ♥ x x   ♦ A 8 2   ♣ K J x x

*Is partner's lead a singleton or doubleton? Count the ♦ s. If declarer had 6 ♦ s, as well as 6 ♥ they would have bid the hand differently. After all, declarer has shown 6 ♥ s ... If you think the lead is from a doubleton and you have the **A**, hold up the **A** and **play an encouraging card (the 8)**. When partner gets back in with their trump honour, they can then return the original suit and get their ruff.*

**Holding up the A preserves lines of communications between you and your partner.**

If East wins the Ace ♦ immediately and returns a ♦, it will be hard for West to ever get East on lead again before all the trumps are drawn and west will never score a ♦ ruff.

## DEFENSIVE SIGNALLING

### Suit Preference

- **When leading a suit for partner to trump**, a *high card* tells partner your entry is in the higher of the 2 remaining suits. A *low card* shows an entry in the lower of the 2 remaining suits. ( i.e. other than the suit being led and the trump suit)

### EXAMPLE:

*Hearts are trump. Partner leads a small ♠ to your ♠ A and from the appearance of all the ♠ honours in dummy, it is obvious that the card partner lead is a singleton. You have an entry in clubs. What ♠ do you lead when you give partner his ruff?*

*[Answer: show an entry in ♣ by leading back the **smallest** ♠ you have!]*

- Remember, occasions for suit preference signals are comparatively rare. When they occur, they are unmistakable. When you have led a suit for the first time, treat partner's card as a come-on in a suit or as a request to switch.
- ONE CARD CARRIES ONLY ONE MESSAGE - e.g. you lead the ♣ K against 4 ♥. Partner plays the 2. If you can rule out the 2 being a singleton and there is no singleton in dummy, the 2 simply means "I don't like your lead. Play something else." It doesn't mean switch to a ♠.

### SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNALS

You are defending 4♠. The auction went as follows:

N	E	S	W (YOU)
1♥	P	1♠	P
4♠	P	P	P

DUMMY	
♠	K 10 9 5
♥	K Q 10 9 6
♦	K Q J
♣	A

♠ 43  
♥ 4  
♦ 765432  
♣ KJ92

This sounds like one of those hands where a short suit lead *might* be just what the doctor ordered! After all, the worse your hand, the rosier the prospects of a ruff! (The fewer points you have when opponents are in only game, the more points your partner must have as she will have entries to her hand to give you a ruff) SO -- you lead your 4♥.

Partner wins the opening lead with the ♥ A and leads back the ♥ J. What is partner trying to tell you?

Answer: Partner has worked out that your lead is a singleton. After all, with all the ♥ honours in dummy and their hand, it can't be bottom of something! Ignoring the suit being led and the trump suit, there are two suits left: a higher ranked suit and a lower ranked suit. By leading back a very high ♥, partner is telling you that he has an entry in the higher of the two remaining suits. (*With ♦ and ♣ as the "leftover suits", he wants a ♦*)

- All you have to do is trump partner's ♥ J, and lead back a ♦. Partner wins the Ace ♦ and leads another ♥ and you will get another chance to trump a ♥. That's the four tricks you needed to defeat the contract!

### DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

### Visualizing Your Strategy

When dummy comes down, count its points, count your points as a defender and count declarer's known points from the bidding. Count HCP only. Then subtract from 40. The remaining points are located in your partner's hand. REMEMBER that number at all times. e.g. 1NT - 3NT You are on lead against 3 NT. You have 14 HCP. Partner cannot have any points at all so expect nothing! In this case, lead top of nothing (952) versus leading fourth best. If you have a sequence, that is always best.

- Always ask yourself where your defensive tricks are coming from.
  - When you see that partner needs a certain card holding to defeat the contract, play him for it.
  - Don't be a hopeless optimist - project the **minimum** amount of honour strength necessary in partner's hand consistent with the bidding to defeat the contract, and **PLAY FOR IT**.
  - Always try and dream up a defence that will beat the contract. If the dream has variations, play for the one that requires the least from partner. Defences that require two or three things to go right are long shots.
  - Use the play to confirm your "suspicions" about the shape and point count of declarer's hand. Count declarer's points as they are revealed during the play of the hand. Counting the suits reveals the distributional pattern. **Declarer is unlikely to have length (5 cards or more) in suits he did not mention in the bidding.**
  - Always ask yourself, what is declarer trying to do ???
    - Remember that there are two main ways for declarers to get rid of losers: trump them in dummy or discard them on extra winners or long suits;
    - If it appears that declarer is going to trump losers in the dummy (i.e. dummy is short of a suit), lead trumps;
    - If it appears that declarer is going to discard them on a long suit, you should attack one of the other suits quickly. (You need to cash tricks in your side suit before declarer can throw them away on dummy's side suit)
- NOTE:** *This is a hard task for the opening leader. But if you win the first trick, you can now see dummy. This will help to determine the strategy that is to follow.*
- Every discard is a clue. Therefore, each defender should seek to discard constructively, so as to provide partner with clues to help him in reading the hand.

### VISUALIZING YOUR STRATEGY

You are defending a 4♠ contract. The auction has proceeded as follows:

N	E (YOU)	S	W
P	P	1♠	P
2♠	P	4♠	All Pass

**Partner leads the ♦ K.** The dummy appears and you must plan your defence as declarer calls for the 4♦ from dummy.

DUMMY		YOU	
♠	Q 9 3	♠	A 7 5 2
♥	K J 9 5	♥	4
♦	10 7 4	♦	A 9 5 3
♣	Q 9 5	♣	7 5 4 3

- Before reading any further, PLAN YOUR DEFENCE !!!
- The best place to start is with an analysis of partner's lead, followed by a count of your defensive tricks. Looks like partner has the ♦ K and ♦ Q. And you have the ♦ A -- which looks like three tricks and with your ♠ A, four tricks. Down one ..... or so it appears!
- So what's the problem? The third ♦ trick is unlikely to materialize, as declarer may well be short! After all, declarer did jump to 4♠ missing the ♠ A and a lot of points in ♦. Let's see if we can't think of another way to defeat the contract that **doesn't** rely on getting three ♦ tricks.
- By now, you may have wondered why we didn't at least *try* for a ♥ ruff -- after all, we do have a singleton! But it looks like partner's only entry to give us that ruff is the ♦ Q, as it is unlikely that partner has the A ♥. What to do? Unfortunately, we cannot communicate to partner at Trick One to switch to a ♥ .
- The answer is simple: at Trick 1, overtake partner's ♦ K with your ♦ A. Lead your singleton ♥, which declarer will win. When declarer draws trump, which looks like the only obstacle to their successful contract, you rise with your ♠ A, lead a ♦ back to partner, and partner leads a ♥ for you to trump (ruff). Thinking defence !!! It is the most exciting part of the game.