

## Playing for ruffs by Sandra Landy

English Bridge *February, 2008*



♠ 8 3  
♥ 9 8 2  
♦ A Q 7 6 5  
♣ 8 6 4

My last article was about choosing the opening lead to a suit contract. I showed you this hand where against 3NT you would lead the ♦6, but against 4♠ you would do better to choose a heart or a club. But what would you lead if the auction had been completely different? It might go

North	East	South	West
1♣	1♠	2♥	pass
4♥			

Different auction, different contract may well mean a different lead is needed. Here your partner has helpfully made an overcall and there is no reason to lead anything but a spade. With only two spades, our partnership agreement is to lead the ♠8, the higher card from a doubleton.

♠ K 9 4	
♥ A 10 7	
♦ J	
♣ A K J 10 9 2	
♠ 8 3	♠ A Q J 10 7
♥ 9 8 2	♥ 6
♦ A Q 7 6 5	♦ 10 9 3 2
♣ 8 6 4	♣ Q 7 5
♠ 6 5 2	
♥ K Q J 5 4 3	
♦ K 8 4	
♣ 3	

Here is the complete deal. On the ♠8 lead, South should play the ♠9 from dummy as East must hold the ♠A, so playing the ♠K won't win the trick. East plays the ♠10 and can tell from your ♠8 lead that you hold a doubleton. So East cashes the ♠A and plays a third spade. You ruff and cash your ♦A for the setting trick.

If you don't take your ♦A now you won't make it. South can set up club winners by ruffing the third round of clubs and getting to dummy with a trump to discard three losing diamonds on North's clubs.

Note how helpful East's 1♠ overcall was. East may only have 9 HCP but an overcall at the one level doesn't promise opening bid values. It shows at least a 5-card suit with a good honour holding. Its aim is to disrupt the opponent's auction after North has opened the bidding. On this deal South was strong enough to bid 2♥ so the heart suit was not lost. But sometimes the overcall will make it very difficult for opponents to find their best contract.

Note also that East played the ♠10 when following to the first spade. That is another partnership agreement. When following suit, play the lowest card that will do the job. When the ♠10 holds, West knows that East has the ♠Q J as well as the ♠10. The ♠Q would win trick one just as well as the ♠10 but it doesn't send extra useful information to West.

Let's change your hand, so that you have three spades.

♠ 8 5 3  
♥ 9 8 2  
♦ A Q 7 6  
♣ 8 6 4

You would still lead a spade against the 4♥ contract because partner bid them. But now you want your lead to suggest you hold three spades, so you should choose the ♠5. Remember our partnership agreement is to play MUD leads. **MUD** stands for **M**iddle **U**p **D**own; you lead the **M**iddle card from three cards without an honour. On the next round you play **U**p, that is the ♠8, and partner knows you started with three spades.

Not all bridge players use MUD, some would always lead the ♠8. This is called a 'Top of Nothing' lead. It shows very clearly that no honour is held, but third hand cannot tell whether you have two or three spades. Consider what happens if you have three spades.

♠ K 9 4	
♥ A 10 7	
♦ 7 5	
♣ A K J 10 2	
♠ 8 5 3	♠ A Q J 10 7
♥ 9 8 2	♥ 6
♦ A Q J 6	♦ 10 9 3 2
♣ 8 6 4	♣ Q 7 5
♠ 6 2	
♥ K Q J 5 4 3	
♦ K 8 4	
♣ 9 3	

You lead the ♠5. With only two spades, declarer might play the ♠K from dummy and East's ♠A wins the trick. East probably cashes the ♠Q and might try the ♠J next, hoping that declarer has three spades. But on seeing your ♠8, East should realise that you have three spades and so declarer only has two. So another spade will be ruffed by South. East should switch to the ♦2; leading up to dummy's weakness and your two diamond tricks will beat 4♥.

Suppose South opens 1♥ and North bids 4♥. What do you lead from that first hand above?

♠ 8 3  
♥ 9 8 2  
♦ A Q 7 6 5  
♣ 8 6 4

This time you haven't got East's helpful overcall to guide you. Leading a heart is doing declarer's job for him. Again a fourth highest diamond would be wrong, so it has to be a club or a spade. Even though partner has not overcalled, it is right to lead a spade. Partner might still be able to give you a spade ruff, whereas that won't be possible in clubs.

If choosing between two suits without honours, it is often right to lead the shorter one in a trump contract but the longer one in no trumps.