

Leading against suit contracts by Sandra Landy

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What is a good lead against a no trump contract may be a very poor lead against a suit contract. For example, you hold:-

♠ 4 3
♥ 9 8 2
♦ A Q 7 6 5
♣ 8 6 4

If your right hand opponent opens 1NT which is raised to 3NT, you would lead the ♦6 without hesitation. You may well give declarer a diamond trick, but you hope to set up four diamond winners in your own hand. Hopefully partner will gain the lead and return a diamond, so that you can cash your four diamond winners and beat 3NT.

But if the opening bid is 1♠ and opponents reach 4♠, the ♦6 is a very poor lead as it may well give a trick away. Partner will return a diamond when on lead, but you won't be able to cash four diamond tricks as declarer will be able to ruff your winning diamonds.

If someone held a gun to your head and said you must lead a diamond, you would lead the ♦A to make sure you got at least one diamond trick. But it would be better to choose another suit, say a heart or a club, and wait for someone else to play diamonds.

Let's see how a heart lead works.

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

North	East	South	West
		1♠	pass
3♠	pass	4♠	

South wins the ♥A and plays the ♠K. Your partner wins the ♠A and plays the ♦9, South plays the ♦J and you win the ♦Q. Now you can cash your ♦A and give your partner a diamond ruff. You would know partner only had a doubleton diamond because the switch to the ♦9 denied a higher card, so declarer must have ♦K J 10. By not leading a diamond you actually made both your ♦A and ♦Q and partner made the setting trick with the ♠2. In suit contracts little cards can win big tricks. Actually South could and should have made 4♠ even on a heart lead, can you see how? The solution is at the bottom of this article.

Suppose your hand had been

♠ 4 3 2
♥ 9 8
♦ K Q J 10 5
♣ 8 6 4

The ♦K is a very good lead, just as it would be against 3NT. You want to drive out declarer's ♦A and set up diamond winners for your side to cash before declarer can discard her diamond losers on a side suit. Of course, because there is a trump suit you do not expect to take four diamond tricks, but you want to take as many tricks as are available in the diamond suit – maybe just one, perhaps two if both declarer and dummy have three diamonds.

Our main aim when leading to a suit contract is not to give away tricks to declarer. This is why that ♦K or any other three card sequence (AKQ, KQJ, QJ10) is always a good lead.

♠ Q 3 2
♥ Q 8
♦ Q 10 8 5 3
♣ Q 6 4

Sometimes no suit is attractive to lead and we have to resort to a fourth highest lead. On this hand the ♦5 is probably the best chance, hoping that partner can produce a useful card and help set up a diamond winner.

Of course we don't always have nice solid sequences to lead. Nor may you have a long suit with honours. With that hand above where you had ♥9 8 2, I suggested that you might lead a heart. The actual heart you should choose is the ♥8. We lead MUD, the middle card from three cards without an honour. If you had decided to lead a club from ♣8 6 4 you would have chosen the ♣6. On the next round you would have played the ♣8. MUD stands for **Middle Up Down**.

Also on the deal above, I said East would switch to the ♦9 and play the ♦3 on the next round. This shows a doubleton because you have not made a MUD lead. People used to play 'Top of Nothing' the highest card in a suit with no honour, whether they held two or three or four cards. This made it very hard to defend well, which is why most people now play MUD.

South must play three rounds of clubs throwing a diamond away from hand before touching trumps. Now West can make the ♦A Q but South will overruff the third diamond and draw all the trumps. The heart loser can be ruffed in dummy.