

CONTINUATIONS VS NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Continuing Your Own Suit

-- After leading the top of a sequence, it is usual to continue with the bottom of the sequence if you can afford to do so. After leading the queen from QJ1083, play the 10 on the next round. This normal sequence of play encourages partner to unblock (with the king or 9) if unblocking is in order. Playing the highest card remaining tells partner not to unblock. This is a general principle: When you lead the queen from QJ3, hoping to find partner with length in the suit, your play of the jack on the second round warns him not to unblock.

-- When continuing a suit with a non-honor, expressing attitude is preferred over giving count. A low card implies a desire to have the suit returned, and a high card discourages a return.

Sometimes an attitude signal will merely describe the leader's holding in his suit:

QJ9 (dummy)

K52

West leads a low card, dummy plays the queen, and East the 2 (a count situation). If West's next lead of the suit is a lower card (encouraging), he should have the ace and East must play the king on the 9. If it is a higher card (discouraging), East must withhold the king, hoping that South's marked ace will be alone at this point. Note that a routine low card from West would not be of any help to East. Similarly:

Q109 (dummy)

K52

Dummy wins West's low lead with the 9, and West later leads a second card in the suit. This should be the *jack* if he started with Jxxxx in the suit, warning East that he does not have the ace (with which he would lead a low card). Then declarer's ace will go while third hand retains the king.

Often an encouraging attitude signal is merely for the purpose of telling partner that running a suit would be desirable:

65

A10742

K983

QJ

West leads the 4 against a 1NT contract. After winning the king, East returns the 3 and West wins the ace. If West continues with the 2, he wants to run the suit. If with the 7, he *suggests* a switch to another suit. He can *force* East to shift by playing the 10, intentionally blocking the suit. His next card (7 or 2) is then a suit preference signal, telling East what suit is desired on the next round.

When leading a card that will obviously establish the suit, then the card led should indicate suit preference. It tells partner (and declarer) where the side entry may lie. This can be very unwise if it helps declarer find a line of play he would not have found otherwise. A good ploy is to play reverse suit preference, lying about the suit in which you have a possible entry when it is unlikely to cause any harm. If declarer wants to eavesdrop on your signals, make him pay.

When you lead from an ace-high suit against a notrump contract, and declarer wins the queen (telling you that he has the king), then play the ace when you get in! He must have started with KQ doubleton or he would not be so accommodating as to let you know that he has both honors.

-- After leading the top of a weak suit, try to give partner a quick count of the suit on the second round. From 874 you have to play the 7 after leading the 8, because 8 then 4 would show a doubleton. From 8742, after leading the 8 you play the 2, showing either a doubleton or four cards originally. From 87642, after leading the 8 play the 7 next, showing an original holding of either three or five cards. These plays accord with the "present count" principle.

Continuing Partner's Suit

It is usual to complete an attitude signal that you may have begun on the first round of the suit. If you have played second-best from three small on the opening lead of the ace, play the bottom card next unless unblocking is called for. If you have played highest from four (Qx or Kx winning in dummy), play the lowest card next.

The standard return of partner's suit after giving a count signal calls for the lead of the top card of two remaining, and the original fourth-best from more.

If you have followed suit from the bottom of a sequence, play the top of the sequence on the second round. If you have played the top of a sequence on the first round (as a signal when unable to beat a card previously played), then play the bottom of the sequence on the second round. Neither play is made, of course, if it could cost a trick.

The most difficult situations are when dummy is very short and it is quite possible for declarer to have more than three cards in the suit. When holding a single facecard in partner's suit, leading the original fourth-best may not work as well as leading the facecard. Here are some examples:

	A	
K1086		J972
	Q543	

East follows suit with the 9 (but the 7 might be better) and in order to run the suit immediately must lead the jack, not the two, when gaining the lead. However, if the jack is covered West may think South started with five cards. If you have played the 7 originally, the jack must be led next because partner won't dream that you have the 9. There just has to be an understanding that the jack may be led from an original three or four. If declarer has either denied or shown four cards in the suit, the defense is much easier.

Leading high can sometimes cost a trick when East is next on lead:

A

Q974

J832

K1065

After playing the 8 to the first trick, leading the jack next will work badly unless East is next to gain the lead. If he leads the 2 back instead, West can safely continue the suit.

Conclusion: When dummy is short, you must use your best judgment as to which card to lead as a continuation. When dummy is not short, returning the original fourth-best of four or five is usually right, but there are exceptions. Sometimes East should return his original *fifth* best, giving attitude priority over count:

9

K10632

AJ754

Q8

West leads the 3, East plays the ace. Now what? If he returns the 5, West might think South started with QJ87, East with A54, and duck the queen. Instead, East should return the 4, his most encouraging card. Then West can win the king and continue the suit (hoping that South didn't start with QJ875!). Note that leading the jack doesn't help matters. It might give West the impression that declarer started with Q87x and East with AJx, making it necessary to duck the queen if West has no side entry.