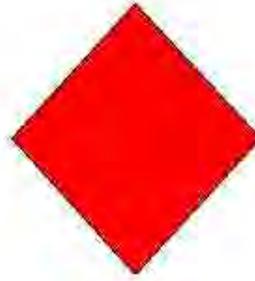


***MARVIN'S
DEFENSIVE
CARD PLAY***



**Leads, Continuations,
and Signals**

Marvin L. French

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LEADS AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Honor Leads

Honor leads against notrump contracts include not only information about neighboring honors (e.g., the king lead shows the queen too), but also may request unblocking, inquire as to “attitude” (“Do you like this lead?”), or ask for count. A lead that warns against unblocking is sometimes useful, as when leading from KQx or QJx.

This “defense handbook” assumes standard attitude signals (high encouraging, low discouraging) and standard count signals (high shows an even number, low an odd number). It also assumes fourth-best leads from length.

The popular “Journalist” leads use the ace to ask for unblocking of a face card held, without which partner shows count. The king lead merely shows a suit headed by AK or KQ, usually accompanied by the jack. In most situations partner shows attitude, not count, but may unblock by playing a high honor. When the leader wants partner to play the jack or ace if he has it, giving count otherwise, he leads the queen from a holding such as KQ109. Except for that holding, the queen lead shows QJ, usually accompanied by the 10 or at least the 9. The jack shows a sequence headed by the jack, with no higher card. The 10 lead shows an interior sequence (e.g., KJ10, A109) and denies a suit headed by only the 109, with which the 9 is led. The ace lead is rather rare, and there is no lead that discourages unblocking.

Other lead systems, such as the puerile “Ace asks for attitude, king asks for count” also have no way to discourage unblocking. Marvin leads have this ability and also tend to distribute the information responsibilities more equally among the honor cards

Marvin Leads

In a nutshell, Marvin leads the ace to ask for attitude, the king to demand unblocking, and the queen to warn against unblocking. The jack is led from J109 and sometimes from QJ9.; the 10 from A109, K109, Q109, AJ10, QJ10, AQJ10, and KJ10 (10 promises strength); 9 from 109.. (9 denies strength); top of any doubleton except 109; and top of three small (but not the 9).

From a non-sequence we lead the standard fourth-best (or third-best from three to an honor). Exception: when declarer is known not to have four cards in the suit (as when denying a major in response to Stayman), the sixth-best card may occasionally be led from six or more. Partner should be able to figure out whether your lead is fourth-best or sixth-best, but declarer won’t be able to. From four or five small cards, the leader must judge whether to lead fourth-best or a high card, as either may turn out to be better. Fifth-best from a good suit is sometimes led as a deceptive move, but this also takes judgment. Remember that the “Rule of Eleven” doesn’t work for a non-standard lead.

-- The lead of the ace:

This lead generally asks for “attitude,” high card to encourage, low to discourage. The leader is usually looking for the queen, such as when leading from AKJx. Sometimes the ace lead is from a short suit (e.g., AKx). Or the leader might have AKxx, when he judges it best to lead high from that suit. Against a gambling 3NT contract, when tricks must be grabbed and fourth-best is seldom advisable, the lead could

even be from AQx or Axx. Other than against a gambling 3NT contract, the ace should not be led from a five-card suit such as AKJxx (lead the king) or AKxxx (lead fourth-best)

Leading the ace from AQJ.. may be in order when the leader has outside strength and partner is unlikely to have an entry (e.g., he has passed your opening bid). The position could be one of these:

	(1) K3
	(2) 63
AQJ32	(1) 97
	(2) 107
	(1) 10654
	(2) K954

In either case a fourth-best lead would work well, but might give declarer an undeserved double stopper. In case (1) the ace lead lets West pick off the king with a small card, establishing the suit. In case (2) it would certainly be counterproductive for East to unblock or give count with the 10. Playing the normal 7, the suit is blocked but can still be established with one loser if West has enough entries. If South has bid the suit, perhaps in response to Stayman, fourth-best is the best choice if the suit is led at all. With no outside entry, fourth-best is also advisable, gaining when partner has the 10 or king, singleton or doubleton, but losing if dummy or declarer has the 10 and declarer the king and two others.

Another possible ace lead is from AQ109.. when partner is unlikely to have an entry. Then you can see what lies in dummy, perhaps Jx or Kx. There is no need to guess the situation on the opening lead, which you are doing if you lead the queen or the 10. Yet another possibility is the ace from AQJ10.., when partner is unlikely to have an entry. Singleton kings do happen.

In these situations, partner plays the king if he has it. The leader must have a good AQ suit, as the ace is not led from weaker holdings (unless declarer has opened a Gambling 3NT, of course).

-- The lead of the king

This lead shows a sequence or broken sequence headed by the king (KQJ.., KQ10..), or a strong suit headed by the ace and king (e.g., AKJ10, AKJ93, AKQ104). It asks for an unblock of any high honor (i.e., not the 10) held, otherwise asking for standard count (not attitude).

With only three or four cards (e.g., KQ2, KQ102, KQJ2), an unblock by partner after a lead of the king could be very damaging. Such holdings therefore call for the lead of the queen. See below.

-- The lead of the queen:

The queen lead warns that unblocking may be unwise. It is led from short KQ or QJ suits. Another possibility is queen from a four-card or longer suit headed by KQ, usually with the 9 but sometimes from length without the 9, in preference to fourth-best. The leader may not relish the possibility of giving up an

early trick by leading fourth-best. After leading the queen from KQ(x) or QJ(x), continuing with the other honor tells partner that the lead is from a short suit.

With no side entry the 10 is usually led from AQ109.., but if the dummy has shown a strong hand, the queen is led. The king may lie in dummy and the jack in declarer's hand, whereupon the lead of the queen prevents declarer from taking two tricks in the suit and establishes the probability of running the rest of the suit if partner can gain entry. As discussed above, the ace may be led from this holding when partner is unlikely to have an entry. The queen may also be led from AQJ.., if dummy has shown a strong hand and is more likely than declarer to have the king.

The bidding is likely to tell partner that these leads are not from a short KQ or QJ suit, and a strong dummy should suggest what you are doing..

-- The lead of the jack:

The jack is usually the top of a sequence, with nothing higher. The jack may also be led from QJ9.., asking partner to play the 10 if he has it. When partner cannot see the 10, he will think the lead is from a jack-high sequence, but the bidding may give a clue. For instance, a weak-two bidder won't have a jack-high suit, so it's safe to play the ace and fire the suit back.

-- The lead of the 10:

The 10 lead shows strength: an interior sequence headed by the jack or 10, or a QJ10 sequence. It can also be the right lead from AQJ10:

KJ10.. AJ10.. AQ109.. AK109..
K109.. A109.. Q109.. QJ10..AQJ10..

-- The lead of the 9:

The 9 lead shows a suit headed by 109 with no higher honor.

-- The lead of the 8:

The 8 may come from a holding such as 987, when the lead of the 9 would be misleading. The 8 is also led from J98.. or A98.., but with K98.. or Q98.. lead fourth-best. The reason for this is given in chapter 1-4, Later Leads Against Notrump Contracts. What should one do with AJ98 or KJ98? If dummy's hand rates to be stronger than declarer's hand, or dummy has bid the suit, the jack can be led to trap a possible queen in dummy. That will look like a lead from QJ9 if partner can see the 10, but that's okay. With five cards, a fifth-best lead is unlikely to do harm. With four, it is not a great lead into a strong declarer hand. Finally, you can lead the 8 and hope for the best.

-- The lead of the 7:

The 7 lead is either fourth-best or the top of a suit, although it might be second-best from a worthless suit headed by the 9 (e.g., 97432, 9754, 975), because the lead of the 9 implies 109. Besides, leading the 9 from 97x can cost a trick (e.g., dummy has J10 doubleton, declarer A8x).

Leading from Weakness

When leading from a suit that has no honors, generally lead the "top of nothing," although fourth-best from four or more small cards is not incorrect. If you lead the top card (or second-best, as mentioned above), partner may assume you have only three cards in the suit and switch to something else, possibly the wrong defense.

This is an occasion for real judgment, and there are no simple guidelines. Well, maybe one: Against weak bidding, especially when there seems to be no dangerous long suit to be run, lead fourth-best and work patiently to establish a winner in the suit. Against strong bidding, especially if the opposition has shown a long suit, or when a switch by partner would be welcome (e.g., holding AQ10 in another suit) lead the top or second-best card (e.g., 7 from 9732) so that partner will not futilely return your lead when a switch would work better. With five or six cards, leading the top card (or second-best) is less desirable, but works out well on occasion. However, an apparently entryless hand with a six-card suit may indeed have an entry if partner has three and the remainder are 2-2.

Leading Partner's Suit

Lead top of a two-card or better sequence (but king from AKx), top of a doubleton, otherwise low from any three, fourth-best from four or more. It is usually best to lead low from three small because partner may need to know you have three cards in the suit. If you have raised, however, generally lead highest from three small. Another occasion for leading high from three small is when you would welcome a switch (e.g., holding AQ10 in another suit), but be aware that partner will play you for two cards at most.

When Partner Has Doubled

If partner doubles a notrump contract, the general rules are these:

-- If only he has bid a suit, he wants his suit led. Exception: When partner has opened the bidding in a suit other than clubs, hasn't bid again, and then doubles a notrump game, he wants the next-lower unbid suit:

South	West	North	East
1S	Pass	Pass	3D
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass
Dbl			

South wants a heart lead, not a spade: S-Q10632 H-KQJ87 D-A C-42 With the majors reversed, he would just pass. A spade lead would then be probable, and defeating 3NT undoubled a good enough result. The double may run East-West out of notrump into a makeable 4D, but at least they won't score an undeserved game. This unusual double is Alertable. When the suit opened is clubs, the double asks for a club lead because it is unlikely that a 1C opener will have a long strong suit outside. Besides, opponents are often contemptuous as to the club strength in a hand that has opened 1C.

-- If only the leader has bid a suit, the doubler asks for the lead of that suit. No doubt he has one or more honors in the suit and wants to make sure partner doesn't try another lead.

-- If both partners have bid a suit, judgment is required. If the leader's long suit is accompanied by side entries, partner's double is probably asking for the lead of that suit:

South	West	North	East
1C	Pass	1S	1NT
2C	3NT	Dbl	

It is most unlikely that North wants a spade lead. He no doubt has a high club honor and wants a club lead. Otherwise South might lead a spade when his clubs are something like AJ9765 (with North holding Kx and East Q10x!).

-- If neither partner has bid a suit, the doubler is usually prepared for the lead of dummy's first bid suit. If you lack a good suit of your own, try leading dummy's suit, which the doubler is supposed to have covered. He may not be *that* well fixed, so if you have some constructive lead of your own, give it a try. If dummy has rebid a suit, it is unlikely to be a good lead. Declarer will no doubt have to go after that suit to make his contract, especially if he has shown no long suit of his own. While partner probably has the dummy's suit well stopped, the best point of attack may lie elsewhere.

-- If dummy has not bid a suit and declarer has bid a minor suit, the double asks for the lead of declarer's suit, not a rarity if his opening bid was artificial or "could be short."

-- If dummy has not bid a suit and declarer has not bid a minor suit, the doubler has a good solid or semi-solid suit that he wants led. Usually that will be the leader's shortest unbid suit. With two short suits, one of which includes a high honor, lead the weaker suit. If in doubt prefer a major to a minor, as the opponents may have a hidden minor in their assets, but rarely a hidden major.

Leading Dummy's Suit

Whether or not partner has doubled the notrump contract, the opening leader may judge that the lead of a suit bid by dummy is the only logical choice. With people bidding very weak suits these days, including two- and three-card minors, the usually unwise lead of an opposing suit may sometimes turn out well.

Such leads often do not follow standard rules for leads. The important consideration in leading dummy's suit is to prevent some singleton or doubleton intermediate card in declarer's hand from playing a role. The way to accomplish this is to lead an honor when possible. Examples:

J from AJ8, KJ8 or better
 10 from A107, Q107, K107, or better

For instance, the suit could be distributed like this:

	J542	
Q1083		K76
	A9	

Leading the 3 gives South two tricks; leading the 10 holds South to one trick in the suit. Of course it is much easier to make such plays later in the hand, when one of the opposing hands is visible. In the above diagram if West judges to lead the suit after North's hand has been exposed, the 10 is the correct card to lead. This is also true if South is dummy.

This sort of lead is sometimes appropriate for an unbid suit, when dummy is known to be very strong and declarer very weak, e.g., dummy has raised a 1NT response to 3NT. You don't want some 9xx in declarer's hand spoiling the defense, as in this deal:

AJ5	
Q1083	K76
965	

Playing against Larry Weiss, the author led the 10 of spades in this situation, holding declarer to 10 tricks instead of 11. The bidding was 1D=1NT=3NT

Leading Declarer's Suit

If declarer has shown four cards in a suit it may affect third hand's play, but lead conventions are the same. However, from AQJxx, KQJxx, QJ10xx, and the like, a fourth-best lead should be considered.

In a Nutshell

The **ace** asks for attitude, usually second highest (Foster Echo)

The **king** asks for unblocking of the jack or higher card, else asks for standard count

The **queen** cautions that unblocking might be unwise

The **jack** shows the top of a sequence or broken sequence, but is possibly from QJ9..

The **10** is from an interior sequence (KJ10, A109, Q109, AQJ10) or QJ10 (promises strength)

The **9** shows a suit headed by 109 (denies strength)

The **8** may be fourth-best, or "top of nothing," or second-best from 98..., or from J98 or A98.

THIRD-HAND PLAY AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

There is really no solution for eliminating ambiguities regarding third-hand plays and signals. All we can do is reduce them to the best of our ability. That is what this chapter tries to do.

Both the opening leader and third hand must take into account a number of variables when deciding on a lead or third-hand play, a continuation, or a switch to another suit. Has declarer denied (or shown) four cards in the suit led? If not, does he quite possibly have four cards in the suit? Does either declarer or dummy have a long running suit, making it necessary to cash out high cards? Does the bidding suggest a passive or active defense? Is the contract doubled and must be defeated? Is the contract unbeatable, making the minimization of overtricks the goal? If it's an IMP game, overtricks matter little and the emphasis is on defeating the contract regardless of risk.

In deriving these third hand plays, two new concepts are introduced: (1) When showing attitude, three small are often better than two small, and (2) an unexpected five-card length must be shown somehow.

When Partner Leads the Ace

This lead generally asks for "attitude," which usually means playing the top of an honor sequence (e.g., J10 or better), second-best (Foster Echo) with everything else, but the lowest card from five (showing two or five). Playing the lowest from five can sometimes save defenders from embarrassment. When the non-singleton queen is in dummy, four cards justify playing the highest card to encourage.

	(1) 96	
	(2) Q6	
AKJ5		(1) 105432 (2) 9842
	(1) Q7	
	(2) 1073	

In situation (1), when West plays the 2 on the lead of the ace, showing two or five, West can go with the odds and continue with the king and jack. East should not play the 5 on the ace lead to show attitude, because West would lead low next, expecting East to have the queen.

In situation (2), West plays an encouraging 9 (8 would be okay too) if he judges that South has Jxx at best. This could be wrong if West has led from AK5, but that's life. If the queen had been singleton, giving South 10753, playing the normal second-best 8 would be costly. Better to play the 4 and follow with the 9 when on lead (showing two or four cards originally).

It may seem odd to play the middle card from three small, but we have to differentiate between two small and three small, and we can't play high to show a doubleton because we are showing attitude, not count.

When dummy has the king, the lead is probably from AQ109.. Instead of playing second-best, East must play the jack if he has it, and otherwise give standard count, low from three or five, high from two or four.

This signal may enable West to lead his queen on the second round when the jack is now singleton in declarer's hand, dummy starting with Kxx.

When partner leads an ace against a gambling-type 3NT contract, the lead may be from Ax(x), AQx, AJx, etc., so third hand should play a very encouraging card only when holding the king.

Let's look at some specific situations, showing the right card to play when the ace is led and dummy has two or three small cards. A possible West hand is shown for each example.

West (leader)	East (third hand)
1) AKJ9	432 - play the 3, lead the 2 when you get in (three cards)
2) AKx(x)	QJ108 - play the queen
3) AKQ8	1092 - play the 9, 10 next to unblock
4) AKQ7	9862 - play the 6, 9 next (two or four)
5) AK97	J103 - play the jack, denying the queen
6) AK92	Q102 - play the 10, promising the queen
7) AK10x	Q3 - play the 3 (queen would show QJ)
8) AKx(x)	QJ3 - play the queen, promising the jack
9) AKx(x)	J10972 - play the 2 (two or five)
10) AKx(x)	Q10864 - play the 10 or 4, depending
11) AKx(x)	42 - play the 2 (two or five)
12) AKxx	QJ42 - Play the queen if declarer can't have four cards, the 2 (two or five) otherwise.
13) AK109	J82 or Q82 - play the 8

In case 1), the second-best 3 is followed by the 2, promising a higher card. Following with the 4 would show 43 doubleton. Partner may need to know about that third card when you lead through.

In case 2) East must play the queen, top of a high sequence. If West mistakenly switches, East can continue with the 10 when he gains the lead, telling West he has the jack and suggesting that he unblock if he has led from AKx. The jack would be continued from QJ or QJx only, warning West not to unblock.

In case 3) the normal rule of signaling from a sequence (play the top card) is not followed because the play of the 10 is reserved for showing the queen. On the next round play the 10 (showing two, but unblocking governs). This is not foolproof, as West may have AK82 and fear QJ76 in declarer's hand when the 10 is covered, East having 109 doubleton.

In case 4) third hand plays 8 and next time the 9, showing two or four. West will usually be able to tell whether this is from an original four cards or from 98 doubleton.

In case 5) West must switch, knowing that South has the queen. Unfortunately there is no way to show length with less than five.

Case 6) illustrates the play of the 10 to show the queen.

Case 7) If declarer wanted an unblock (as with AKJ10), he could have led the king.

In case 8) East plays the queen but must not unblock if West plays the king on the second round, showing the lead was from AKx.

In case 9) East should play the 2, hoping that West won't play him for 72. Playing the 2 may enable West to drop a doubleton queen in declarer's hand when the play of the jack would cause him to switch. It may also result in declarer making a trick with Qxx when West continues from AKx (he doesn't know about East's J10), but the suit would be blocked anyway. East would need two entries to run the suit without giving up a trick. If that's what he has, he can afford to play the jack on the first round.

In case 10) the 10 may be best. It guarantees the queen, so West will be able to continue the suit. If West has AKJx, however, the x continuation would block the suit if East has to play the queen. East should take a good look at his own and dummy's spots before playing the 10, and play the lowest card instead of the 10 if blockage is possible. Then West will continue with king and jack instead of the x, if he judges that East did not start with a low doubleton.

In case 11) East plays the lowest card, showing two or five cards.

In case 12) the queen play may cost a trick if declarer has four cards, so if that is a possibility it may be better to play the 2, showing five. West will then continue with the king and another.

In case 13) West won't know whether East has the queen or the jack, too bad.

When Partner Leads the King

This lead shows a sequence or broken sequence headed by the king (KQJ.., KQ10..), or a strong suit headed by the ace and king (e.g., AKJ10, AKJ83, AKQ104). It asks for an unblock of any high honor held, otherwise asking for standard count (not attitude).

75

	(1) Q92
AKJ106	(2) 9432
	(3) 932
	(4) 92

West leads the king. In case (1) East plays the queen. In case (2) and (4) he plays the 9 because he has an even number of cards. West must guess whether two or four, but the bidding may guide him. In case (3) East plays the 2 to show an odd number of cards in the suit. West knows that he must switch if he wants five tricks from this suit.

75

	A85 - play the ace
KQ10xx	98 - play the 9
	976 - play the 6
	9865 - play the 9
	J965 - play the jack

When West leads the king, East's play of a count card rather than a high honor tells West that South has both ace and jack. If South wins the first lead, it will usually mean that he started with AJ doubleton, but not always. The count should clarify the situation for West. Note the clear signals: 9 from 9865, not the 8 or a subtle 6. Playing the 8 would deny the 9.

With only three or four cards, e.g., KQ2, KQ102, KQJ2), an unblock by partner after a lead of the king could be very damaging. Such holdings therefore call for the lead of the queen. See below.

When Partner Leads the Queen

This lead warns against unblocking, so third hand merely shows attitude. However, if the lead is from QJx or KQx a high attitude signal could be costly (perhaps establishing a fourth-round trick for declarer). Therefore an "upside-down" signal is called for, lowest to encourage, high to discourage.

The queen may also be led from AQJ.., or even AQ10.., if dummy has shown a strong hand, so third hand should be aware of that possibility and not assume the lead is from a short suit in that case.

When Partner Leads the Jack

The jack is usually the top of a sequence and the highest card in the suit. If there is a finessable honor in dummy, Scanian ("upside-down") signals apply (see section 1-6). The lead could also be from QJ9.., which will be obvious if third hand can see the 10 (which he plays if it's in his hand) or partner has shown a good suit in the auction (e.g., via a weak two bid). Holding the ace and 10, third hand of course plays the ace and then the 10. Holding the king and 10, the 10 should suffice when holding three or more cards. Playing the king might look like Kx to partner, who wants to know where the 10 is.

Playing an ace when not seeing the 10 could give declarer two tricks instead of one if dummy is very short and partner has led from J10. However, pursuing the suit could still be the best line, so it's probably best to do that.

When Partner Leads the Ten

The 10 lead shows an interior sequence headed by the jack or 10, or a QJ10 sequence.

KJ10.. AJ10.. AQ109.. AK109.. AQJ10..
K109.. A109.. Q109.. QJ10..

If there is no finessable honor in dummy third hand must usually play his highest honor (or bottom of touching honors). As said before, the ace or queen may sometimes be led from AQ109.. and the ace or king from AK109.. With no high card to play, if declarer wins the 10 with the ace you know that the lead is from QJ10 and declarer holds AK. If he wins with the king you won't know if the lead is from AJ10 (declarer holding KQ) or QJ10 (declarer holding AK), but it isn't likely to matter. Partner may be able to use the Smith Echo to say he has led from AJ10.

One possibly troublesome situation is when dummy has the king and third hand has the ace. The ten must be ducked in case the lead is from QJ10. If declarer has the jack (lead is from Q109) he will win the jack and first hand must have an entry to lead through the king again.

When Partner Leads the Nine

The 9 lead shows a suit headed by 109 with no higher honor. Third hand chooses whatever play seems right.

When Partner Leads the Eight

The 8 may be fourth best, high from weakness, or from a holding such as 987, when the lead of the 9 would show the 10. The 8 is also led from J98.. or A98.., but with K98.. or Q98.. lead fourth best. The reason for this is given in chapter 1-4, Later Leads Against Notrump Contracts. Although the 9, not the 8, is led on later leads from J98 or A98, that discussion applies here. The leader can perhaps use the Smith Echo (page 1-6-3) to imply that the 8 was not from weakness.

When Partner Leads the Seven

An interesting position:

J43	
7 led	Q52

When dummy plays small, East should usually duck, playing second-best. If West has led from A1087 (giving declarer K96) the duck is necessary, and East must not continue the suit if he gets on lead. If West has led from A1087x, then South has K9 doubleton. East must then not only play low on the first round of the suit, but must lead low, not the queen, when gaining the lead. Also, West must lead the ace on the second round if he is on lead.

If West started with K1087 or K987 the duck will do no harm, and may gain by preventing dummy's jack from being an entry. In this case East must continue the suit if he gets in. How can he know whether East has led from the ace or the king? Maybe West should use the Smith Echo with the king but not with the ace.

If West has led from AK107x, AK87x, or AK97x, the duck will not turn out well. Perhaps it is better to lead the ace from these holdings, especially when holding a likely entry. Leading the x should also be considered.

When You Can't Beat Dummy's Singleton

When dummy's singleton honor is higher than partner's lead, and you cannot top it:

-- With a doubleton play low, except when unblocking is called for (e.g., you have Qx and a fast entry). Also play lowest from five, not from three or four small. Partner will be very glad to know you have five if declarer started with only two.

-- From a two-card or longer sequence headed by the jack or better, play the top of the sequence if you think it is safe to do so. Play the bottom of the sequence (or original fourth best, depending) on the next round.

Partner leads fourth best and dummy has a singleton ace. If you have:

KQx, play the king, queen next
 QJ102, play the queen, 10 next (bottom of sequence)
 QJ32, play the queen, 2 next (present count), or sometimes the jack

J106, play the jack, 10 next (count, unblocking)
 Q103, play the 10, promising the queen or king, queen next

A "sequence" must be headed by a facecard. A holding of 1098 is not treated as a sequence, but as merely "three small," so you have to play the 9, and the 8 next (promising a higher card). With a two-card sequence and four cards (e.g., QJxx), third hand may choose to lead the higher honor to the second round of the suit, although the standard continuation is the original fourth-best card.

Of course you don't play an honor, even with a sequence, if it could cost a trick:

A

6 led	QJ103
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If East judges that West is long in the suit, he will play the queen. On the next round he will play the 10. If the 6 is "top of nothing," however, East must play the 3 to the first trick. Playing the queen could cost a trick if West has led from, say, 6542, and South has K987.

-- Lacking a sequence, generally play second-best, but the lowest card shows two or five. If you have:

986, play 8, 6 next, promising another card
 KJ3, play the jack
 432, play the 3, 2 next
 10854, play the 8 and then the 10, or the 5 and then the 8 (shows two or four)
 9632, play the 6 or the 3, depending, 9 next. The 2 would show 2 or 5
 Q62, play the 6
 1072, play the 7
 92, play the 2 (two or five)
 Q9862, play the 2 (two or five)

If you are afraid of encouraging partner when he is likely to gain entry next, it's okay to play second-worst from four small. Leading the top card next will show an original two or four.

Some further comment is perhaps needed concerning this non-standard play from small cards. First, it's obvious that you can't play the same from Q92 and 92, so the 2 must be played from 92 unless attitude signals are to be abandoned. From 92 therefore, the play sequence is 2, then 9. If you are going to distinguish between two and three cards, which may be important at times, you have to play 932 differently from 92 or 93. That means playing 3, then 2. From 9632 you play 6 or 3, then 9, which is either from an original 9x or 96xx. Partner should usually be able to tell which.

When the queen has been led, however, third hand follows the general rules for following suit to the queen (play a high honor, otherwise give standard count).

A

KQ1065	985 J85
J732 9732	

With 985 East plays the 5 to the lead of the queen, giving standard count. With J85 he may choose not to play the jack, especially if he has a quick entry, since doing so could give South (as in this case) a second stopper. With no quick entry, he just has to play the jack and hope it doesn't cost a trick.

When Dummy Plays High from Kx

One of the most frustrating situations in notrump defense has dummy winning with a doubleton royal (king or queen) your fourth-best lead from an ace. If it's the king, where is the queen? If in declarer's hand, is it alone? If it's the queen, declarer has the king, but how many? It is horrible to find out later that declarer's royal would have fallen under your ace had you played it when gaining entry. Not only that, but you can't tell whether it's safe to lead low again, and sometimes can't tell that the suit will run when it is led back. How can partner help? The standard play for third hand is to show attitude (some say count), but that may be of little value. Playing second-best from a face card shows attitude but not length, and playing the lowest from any three shows count but not attitude.

Let's start with king-small in dummy, king winning, and you as third hand have some number of small cards. The worst non-singleton holding is a small doubleton, so play the standard lower card to show a very negative attitude. Three small is not so bad, four small is good, and five small is so great that partner must be informed immediately. There is no perfect solution, but playing the lowest card only from two or five and the second-highest from three or four will give partner a chance to find the right continuation when gaining the lead, or to decide on a switch. It will provide excellent information if you get the lead and return the suit. In any event, after playing second-highest from three, play the lowest next, showing an original three, after second-highest from four play the highest next, showing an original two or four, and after lowest from five, play the original fourth-best, showing an original two or five. Yes, this is not "present count," but royalty requires a deviation from standard signaling.

Now, what if you have the queen and/or jack over dummy's king? You must play the queen with any length up to four (the lowest from five), which cannot hurt if the king play is logical. Partner will be glad to know declarer doesn't have it, whether the suit was led from the ace or jack. After playing the queen without the jack, the next card shows present count, so the "deuce" shows an original four. With the jack and no queen, play it from two or four but play second-best from three and the lowest from five. Playing the jack cannot hurt in any case, but playing it only from two or four provides better information than a standard second-best or playing it always. A non-intuitive non-standard play of the ten from J10x promises the jack because you cannot have the queen and the agreed play from three is second-best. If you are the first to gain entry, your lead of the jack is known to come from an original three, which could be important.

A 10xx holding presents a problem. After playing the middle card, what should be led if you lead the suit next? The three-small rule says led the lowest original card, but the 10 might be needed as a "pusher" and/or an unblock for partner's suit. If declarer is known not to have four cards in the suit, leading the lowest card is harmless and gives count. If he does have four and partner has led from AJ98 or J98 (which the 8 lead implies) then of course the 10 should be led.

But what do you do with both queen and jack? No doubt play the queen, but partner won't know whether it's from Qxxx or QJx (not Qxx because declarer would not have played the king with Jxx in hand). Playing the ace with A108x left is safe, counting on you to unblock the jack. However, if the lead was from A98xx the unblock will elevate the 10 if declarer started with 10xx. In that case the next lead must be low to the jack. That doesn't work well if declarer started with Jx and had guessed to play the king on the opening lead. Any solution? Only this: most declarers will think a while before playing the

king with Jx in hand, but with 10xx will shrug and play the king without much thought. Also, a Smith Echo can say the queen was from QJ. This is a very uncommon situation, not a big negative for the method. Leading low the second time caters to a doubleton QJ, the leader lacking the 10, so in case of doubt that is probably best.

What about an AJxx(x) suit for the opening leader? Will the automatic queen play be a problem? With two it is mandatory, unblocking so as to lead the small card if on lead. From queen-third? That gives declarer 10xxx or 10xx. If the latter, the AJ will pick up the 10. If the former, declarer would probably not win the king, very bad news if it loses to the ace. If he ducks to his 10xxx, that costs a trick but the 10 blocks the suit in cases that matter, and the duck wins big if the lead was from QJ. Conclusion: playing the queen from queen-third is all right.

When Dummy Plays High from Qx

When queen-small is in dummy, queen winning, third hand plays in the same manner, jack from two or four, etc. Partner would like to see the jack if the lead was from the king, as declarer could have either the ace or ace-jack. However, playing the jack from jack-third does not provide count, which may be needed if the lead is from an ace. Playing lowest of three when lacking the jack might seem logical, but also gives the wrong count. Since it is often possible for the leader, looking at many spot cards, to read the second-best play as from the jack, it is probably best not to violate the general rules We can't do everything.

When Dummy Plays High from Jx

If third hand can't cover he plays low from two or five cards, second-best from three, including the 9 from 109, and the highest card from four.

	J7
AQ85	1096 10843 108632
	K432 K92 K9

When the 9 is played from 109, South following low, West knows that South does not have the 10, so East must have it with fewer than four cards. When East plays the 10 from 10843, showing four cards, West knows that South has the guarded king. When East plays the 2 from 108632, showing two or five, West can lay down the ace when he gets in.

When Dummy Plays High from Ax(x), Kxx, or Qxx

When the dummy plays high from Ax(x), Kxx, or Qxx, third hand should routinely play the quack (queen or jack) from any number of cards (but lowest from an unlikely five), just to let partner know where it is:

A76

J1043

Q85

K92

If dummy plays the ace on the lead of the 3, East should throw the queen unless he is eager for a shift when West gets in. Declarer would not play the ace with a holding that would benefit from this play. With no quack to play, third hand should play second-best.

East should also play the jack when dummy plays high from Qxx. If declarer has Axx (unlikely, but possible if declarer needs a fast entry to dummy or the bidding places the king with West), partner will want to know where the jack is.

Lacking the jack, East should play second-best from three, highest from four, lowest from two or five. His next card will clarify the situation (high-low shows three, low-high shows two or four, lowest-higher shows two or five). With five, lead the original fourth-best on the next round, but play high to partner's lead of a high honor (present count) unless that could block the suit.

When You Can Beat All Cards Played So Far

-- Follow suit from the bottom of a sequence, play the top of the sequence next.

With QJ10 the rule would dictate that you follow suit with the 10, but this holding is an exception. The play of the jack from QJ10 is the right play against a notrump contract. After leading from the ace, if you play the 10, he will think perhaps you have J10, giving declarer KQx, and may not continue the suit when he gets in. When you play the jack, he will figure you either had QJ or declarer started with KQ10. In either case it can't hurt for him to continue the suit. A benefit of this is that when you do have J10 and play the 10 partner will know declarer must have both king and queen.

Similarly with J109, the ten is played. If the lead was from the king, to partner the 10 seems to deny the 9, so he will place declarer with AQ9 (AQJ9 either unlikely or impossible) when the queen wins, making a continuation safe (the jack must be in your hand). If the 9 is played to the first trick, partner may fear AQJ in declarer's hand.

If the lead was from the ace, however, things could get sticky. If partner or the dummy has the 9, that rules out J109 in your hand. But suppose the lead was from A8xxx, no 9 in dummy. Partner knows you would play the jack from QJ10, so you can't have the queen when you play the 10. That that may look like J10(x), declarer holding KQ9. When gaining entry, partner may lead a low card into declarer's now-singleton king or queen. Is that a guess? Not usually, because declarer would win the queen with KQ doubleton, letting West know that he has the king. If he wins the king he most surely holds the queen (which partner has denied) and another.

Note that it would do declarer no good to know about these agreements, as a holding of QJx or J10x is more likely than QJ10 or J109.

If partner has led from the queen, playing the 10 creates no problem for him that would not normally exist (declarer perhaps playing high from AKJ as a deceptive move).

-- Lacking a sequence, play third- hand- high when there is nothing to capture in dummy. Holding AQx against a notrump contract, however, the queen is nearly automatic to prevent declarer from holding up with the king. A lack of entries is not necessarily a reason for playing ace, then queen, because doing so enables declarer to safely (and successfully) finesse in other suits through partner. If that doesn't look possible, go ahead and play ace-queen when entryless, to make sure partner knows what's going on in the suit. If you do play the queen, your next play (on declarer's suit) should be a high card (if count or deception is not in order) to indicate satisfaction with the opening lead. See Smith Echo in Section 1-5, Signals in Notrump Defense.

Special Situations

There are other situations when the third hand high rule can be violated. Suppose you have a fast entry, K94 in partner's probable five-card suit, and figure that he must have the ace of his suit to beat the contract. Dummy has a small singleton, and the lead was the 7, so declarer has two higher. If you play the 9 instead of the king, declarer may make the mistake of winning the trick with QJxx. If you play the king and then the 9, he will be more likely to make the correct play of ducking the 9.

The same sort of play may be appropriate with AJx (declarer holding K10xx or Q10xx), or with K10x, KJx, A9x, etc. These plays are generally correct only if the holder can see that he himself holds all the early defensive entries in the other suits, so that misleading partner will do no harm.

When partner leads fourth best and dummy is winning the trick with a holding like QJ10, Q109, third hand must show standard count, even when holding Kxx. (playing the king is usually unwise). The reason is that if partner is leading from the king he needs to know if declarer's ace is now singleton. With a five-card holding extremely unlikely, playing the lowest card can safely show three as well as the usual five. However, if dummy's holding is something like KQx attitude is shown (three or more small cards are good, two are bad), so play of the lowest card shows a doubleton or singleton (or an unlikely five).

In a Nutshell

The **ace** asks for attitude, usually second highest (Foster Echo). Play:

Usually play second-best, but:
 Play the top of a two-card or longer sequence
 Play bottom from 2 or 5
 Play of the 10 promises the queen or king

The **king** asks for unblocking.

Play the A, Q, or J
 Else give standard count, high from even, bottom from odd

The **queen** cautions that unblocking may be unsafe, asks for attitude (upside-down)

Play high from weakness, low from strength (to preserve trick-taking ability)

The **jack** is usually from J109.., sometimes from QJ9..

If you can see the 10, no ambiguity (play it if in your hand, usually unblock with ace or king).

The **ten** promises strength.

The **nine** is from 109, denying strength.

The **eight** is ambiguous: fourth-best, extreme weakness, or from J98.. or A98..

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.

LATER LEADS AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

There is an old adage that the defense figures to lose a trick every time it breaks a new suit. Knowing when to do so (being "active" vs "passive") is one of the most difficult aspects of defense.

There are four basic situations: (1) Leading through weakness in dummy up to possible declarer strength; (2) Leading through one or more honors in dummy; (3) Leading through declarer up to weakness in dummy; and (4) Leading through declarer up to one or more honors in dummy. In all situations, non-honor leads tend to show attitude, not count: low from strength, high from weakness. When not playing a "pusher," follow suit to later leads with attitude, not count. The following general rules may be violated freely for tactical or deceptive reasons.

Leading Through Dummy's Weakness

When dummy has no card higher than the 10, treat the switch to a new suit mostly the same as an opening lead. However, the 9 is led from A98x or J98x when dummy has the 10. Otherwise you lead low from these holdings because the 9 implies 109 (and nothing higher). The 9 is not led from K98 or Q98, even if the 10 is in dummy. Look at this situation:

	1 0 7 6	
A 9 8 3		Q 5 4
	K J 2	

Regardless of whether North or South is dummy, West leads the 9. East must duck, letting the jack win. If West has led from four cards, East must not continue the suit later if declarer is to be denied a trick in the suit.. He can't play correctly if he has to allow for the K98 in the West hand. Another:

	1 0 7 6	
J 9 8 3		A 5 4
	K Q 2	

West leads the 9, dummy (correctly) plays the 10, and East wins. East knows that declarer has the KQ, so he can now switch to a more promising suit. If he had to allow for the queen or king in West's hand, he would not know to switch.

Leading Through Dummy's Strength

When dummy has one or cards higher than the 10, lead the top of any sequence, including interior sequences. For instance, if dummy has the queen, lead the jack from KJ10 or J109 and the 10 from 109. Scanian signals apply as usual when playing over dummy's finessable honor. See section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense.

The lead of the 9 from A98 or J98 applies in this situation also, because the 10 is led from 109. In the diagramed situation West is on lead:

Q32

J986

K54

A107

West leads the 9 and North plays low. East, if he has no fast entry, must duck the 9. If he plays the king, West will not be able to continue the suit when he gets in. But if East has the early entry, he must play the king on the first round (work it out). If South is declarer and West has led from A98 then East's play probably doesn't matter. When East ducks the with the king and the 10 wins the trick, West must lead the jack from J8 when he gets in (top of a sequence, now that the 9 and 10 are gone), not the 8. He would continue with the 8 only when holding A98 originally, telling East to play the king if he has it rather than duck again. Incidentally, the same plays apply if South is dummy.

Leading Up to Dummy's Weakness

When dummy is on the right with no ace or face card, revert to the same system of high card leads as is used for opening leads. The 10 promises higher strength as usual (e.g., A109.. , KJ10..), jack is highest card usually (but could be from AJx or KJx tripleton in some tactical situations), and the 9 tends to deny a card higher than the 10. However, it is the king that warns against unblocking in this case (it may be unsupported), and the ace requests it (e.g., AKJ10). Lead high from weakness, sometimes second best (e.g., 8 from 1086), even with length.

9876

A42

QJ105

K3

Declarer will surely play the king when East leads the 5. The play also gains if West has any singleton or declarer has a singleton king. Even when the holding is KQJx, leading the x is usually best unless two fast tricks are sufficient.

When leading low from four cards to an honor, semi-attitude is employed. Lead the lowest card from ace or queen, a middle-sized card (usually third best) from king or jack. Examples:

65

K1087

AJ42

Q93

East's lead of the 2 tells West that he has the ace or queen, so he can safely return the suit after winning South's 9 with the 10, not worrying that South may have started with AQ9.

76

AJ94

Q832

K105

When East leads the 2, South plays the 10, and West wins declarer's 10 with the jack, West knows the lead is from the queen and that South has the king.

65
 AJ94 K872
 Q103

East's lead of the 7 may not be entirely clear to West, but with the 2 and 3 missing when South plays the 10, he can assume that East has the king.

654
 AQ9 J873
 K102

East's lead of the 7 is ambiguous: Does he have the king or the jack? Perhaps the less encouraging 8 would be a better lead, even though it would look like top of nothing.

652
 K104 J873
 AQ9

Now East's lead of the 7 will be read as probably coming from the jack. After winning South's 9 with the 10, West switches.

Some holdings will be troublesome for this system of leads, and the absence of any length indication can also cause difficulty. It may be better to lead the honor from Hxx, and partner should not assume that an honor lead is from the top of a sequence. When the lead is "last train," the last opportunity to take tricks, the highest card is routinely led and partner must not assume that it's from a sequence unless giving up an overtrick is deemed unimportant.

Leading Up to Dummy's Strength

When dummy has one or more cards higher than the 10, lead the top of standard sequences, but the 10 from any internal sequence and the 9 from 109. The 10 therefore promises something higher than the jack (AJ10, KJ10, K109, or Q109).

This policy is especially important when leading up to dummy's queen from J109 or KJ10. The lead of the jack permits partner to duck with the ace, waiting for a lead through declarer's king. The lead of the 10 tells partner to play the ace, as the lead is from KJ10.

As with opening leads, lead the 8 from A98 or J98, but fourth-best Q98 or K98. For example:

Q54 (dummy)
 A76 J983
 K102

South is known to have no more than three cards in the suit. East leads the 8, not the 3, up to dummy's queen. West knows that East cannot have KJ83, so he takes his ace and switches instead of uselessly

returning the suit. If West had the 10, he would know to duck the 8 lead, waiting for East to lead through again.

Yes, East could have KJ98, what then? That would give South 1032. East would just have to lead the 9, which will look like a lead from 109. This is unlikely to hurt, as West will probably continue the suit in order to set up a long card in the East hand.

Tactical Considerations

When deciding to break a suit like Axx, Kxx, or sometimes even Qxx, hoping partner has length as well as a high card in the suit, it is often best to lead the high card. Leading low could result in the suit being blocked if partner misguesses what you have led from. He might play high when he should play low to preserve his only entry. Leading the high card, then a low card, makes it easier for him to duck.

There is a general rule to follow when leading up to (not through) dummy: If you have dummy's best card in a suit "surrounded," plus a higher card, pretend dummy's card is in your hand and lead according to standard leads:

Dummy Holds:	You Hold:	Lead:
10xx	KJ9, AJ9	J
9xx	Q108, K108, A108	10
Jxx	AQ10	Q

In each case, putting the "surrounded" card in the defender's hand would create an interior sequence, from which the standard lead is the top of the sequence. Doing so puts dummy's high card out of the picture, rendering it valueless to declarer. Actually the same leads should be made even if that lowest card is not held. If partner has the necessary spot card(s), the lead will gain. If not too bad; leading low would not help.

The same leads are made when it is declarer's hand that may have the "surrounded" card and a trappable honor is in dummy. For instance, lead the jack from KJ9 (or any KJx, for that matter) when leading through dummy's queen. If partner has A10x, he will thank you for not leading low and making him guess who has the jack. If declarer has the 10, he can't force out the ace by ducking in dummy, as a low lead would let him do.

The following diagram shows three common situations. In each one East is on lead and must lead the queen or the jack, not ace or low, if he hopes to get three fast tricks. South must guess right in order to make a trick, since East might have QJx and make the same play. Against good players South should invoke the rule of restricted choice and cover, making the assumption that East does not have QJ when he leads the queen or jack. Note that it doesn't matter whether North or South is dummy.

1072

J83	AQ96
AJ8	Q963
AQ8	J963

K52

The following are more advanced situations. You are West on lead, and again it doesn't matter whether North or South is dummy:

J8

A1065	Q73
-------	-----

K942

Lead the ace, East unblocking with the 7. South may hold up on the next round, but that can't be helped. At least East-West will grab two quick tricks and the 10 will be established. If the 8 and 6 were interchanged, then the lead of the 10 leaves South helpless if East can get the lead later.

97

A1086	Q32
-------	-----

KJ54

Lead the 10. East plays low and then leads the queen upon gaining the lead.

98

AJ65	1072
------	------

KQ43

Lead the jack. East unblocks with the 7 and leads the 10 when gaining the lead.

10

AQ862	974
-------	-----

KJ53

Lead the queen.

108

AQ75	J43
------	-----

K962

Lead the queen.

J9
 Q1064 K83
 A752

Lead the queen, East unblocking with the 8. The play is the same if the king and queen are interchanged, of course.

104
 KJ83 Q72
 A953

Lead the king or jack; a lead of the 3 may work too slowly. The same play is made if 9x is in dummy and South may have A10xx (an easy play to miss, so look for it!).

107
 AJ84 Q63
 K952

Lead the jack, continue with the 4 when next on lead.

Q3
 KJ83 A94
 10762

Lead the king, partner unblocking with the 9. If you are East, lead the 9 and hope partner continues.

SECOND HAND PLAY AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Everything in this section assumes that false-carding is not involved. False-carding always takes preference over any other play. When count must be given for a possible hold-up by partner, that also has priority.

-- When declarer leads from low cards in dummy toward his hand, second hand should play the top card of a four-card or longer solid sequence. Splitting honors from a two-card sequence (e.g., J10x, QJx, KQx) is often wrong, and splitting from a three-card sequence can be wrong also. Therefore playing the highest card from a sequence implies fourth-round control. If it is judged necessary to split a two-card or three-card sequence, do not play the highest card.

532 (dummy)
 K7 J1098
 AQ64

Declarer leads the 2 from dummy, East playing the jack and West winning the king. West knows that he can continue the suit, both as a safe exit and to set up tricks for his side. If East had played the jack from J1094, returning the suit would only help declarer (who would have AQ86). With only three cards J109 East should not play the jack, and with J10x he should not split at all.

Treat cards that are going to be swallowed as if they were in your hand. For instance, K1097 is equivalent to K1098 if the 8 is doubleton in dummy. Similarly:

92 (dummy)
 A73 QJ108
 K654

If declarer leads dummy's 2 toward the king, East should play the queen, not the 8.

-- The same rules apply when declarer leads toward one or more honors in dummy. Splitting with an unnecessarily high card implies fourth-round control.

SIGNALS IN NOTRUMP DEFENSE

This chapter will make no mention of such signaling conventions as "odd-even discards," "Lavinthal," etc., because they are self-defeating in the presence of an eavesdropping declarer.

Giving Count When Following Suit

When desiring to give partner a count of how many cards you hold in a suit, follow with the lowest card from an odd number and the highest you can spare with an even number. In attitude situations a high card is encouraging, a low card discouraging.

Sometimes it is hard to tell whether one should signal. Say dummy holds KQ109 in a suit, and there are no side entries to dummy. Declarer leads a small card toward dummy and you have J873. Should you start a high-low to show four, so partner will know how long to hold up the ace? Yes? Too bad, declarer has Axx and finesses your jack on the third round, thanks to the count you gave.

The solution is to play the 7 on the first round, then follow with the 3 if declarer leads a second low card toward dummy, giving partner (who has the ace) the right count. If declarer plays the ace on the second round, you follow with the 8 and let him make what he will of the 3 on the third round. You would play the same way with 873, of course, if sure that declarer doesn't have a singleton.

Except for such deceptive purposes, always signal as clearly as possible. With 9842, show four by playing the 9, then 2, not a subtle 4, then 2. Partner may need to know the count on the *first* round. In some cases the second part of the signal can serve as suit preference, in which case you would play the 9, then a suit-preference card.

Of course you do not signal length when declarer is playing a suit that requires no hold-up by partner. In that case a suit preference, periscope, Smith echo, or alarm clock signal may be in order.

Scanian Signals

Scanian signals (modified here) consist of upside-down signaling at times, as preservation of trick-taking ability must take priority over normal signaling:

-- When dummy has a finessable honor

A finessable honor is one that is not accompanied by a touching card. Q102 has two finessable honors, QJ2 has none. The signal applies when following suit and when discarding.

-- When a card in declarer's hand is quite likely finessable.

Holding AK92 over declarer, it is not necessary to play the 9 on partner's lead of the jack through declarer's queen. The 2 says "come on."

-- When the third hand to play is following suit with possibly four-card length in the suit and likely cannot spare a high card to encourage.

Examples of Scanian signals:

AJ	
873	KQ104
	9652

West leads 8, ace played from dummy, East plays the 4 to encourage, not the 10.

	K65
J1043	A92
	Q87

Jack led, 5 played from dummy, East plays the 2 to encourage, not the 9. A good example of why Scanian signals were invented.

Suit-preservation signals apply even when there is no finessable honor in dummy:

	A65
J6	KQ104
	9873

West leads the jack of a suit that East has bid, with possible four-card length. When the ace is played, East plays the 4 to encourage, not the 10.

	J2
Ace led	Q103

The ace is led against 1NT doubled and East plays the 10 to encourage, promising the queen. This is not a Scanian situation because dummy is not being finessed and suit-preservation (playing the 3) will mislead partner. Moreover, unblocking could be important (as when the lead is from AK93). West will know East has the queen but not the jack and may choose to switch when lacking the 9.

Smith Echo

When partner has led a suit against a notrump contract, playing a high card when following to the first lead of a long opposing suit says that you liked partner's lead: Continue that suit! A lowest card says that you did not like that suit, lead something else if your suit isn't sure to set up. A middle card says partner should do what seems best to him...you have no definite wishes. With only two cards, you can't be neutral, and with a singleton you must signal willy-nilly!

The opening leader can also use the Smith Echo. A high card says, "I want my suit returned!" A lowest card says, "Don't return my suit, there's no future in it." A middle card says, "You can switch or not when you get in, I have no definite opinion."

With three cards you can give shading to these meanings, since there are six possible ways to play three cards. For example, middle card, then up, then low, says you're not sure but probably the first suit should be continued because you are not looking at a good switch suit. Middle, then low, mildly suggests a switch. Low, then high, then middle, says you lean toward a switch but a continuation of the first suit could be all right. Playing the middle card on the second round says that the first signal was a strong one.

With four cards you can really get subtle, but we won't go over the 24 possible ways of playing four cards.

The Smith Echo is not used when a defender must give count in a possible hold-up situation. It only applies when it is obvious that the count will not be of any assistance to partner.

Similarly, the echo does not apply when a defender may be in a false-card situation. Both false-carding and count take preference over the Smith Echo. And, of course, the Smith echo does not apply when an abnormal card might aid declarer's play of his suit.

When it is obvious to everyone at the table that there is no future in the suit led, Smith echo does not apply. This may be an occasion for suit preference or periscope signaling.

Be very careful not to hesitate before playing a card in a Smith Echo situation. Doing so says "I'm not sure," which is an illegal message. If in doubt, play low or high but don't hesitate!

Periscope

When declarer is about to take all the remaining tricks and partner may be eager to know declarer's distribution, a periscope signal may help. The signal shows the count of the highest ranking suit for which count is unknown. Playing a low card at one's first opportunity from another suit shows an odd number of cards in that suit, playing a high card shows an even number. Of course it must be obvious to partner that you have a choice of cards to play, and that the card(s) played could not logically be serving some other purpose (count, suit preference).

S- A653
 H- 84
 D- Q5
 C- A9763

S- Q42
 H- KJ92
 D- 109
 C- K1054

S- 10987
 H- A763
 D- 8732
 C- J

S- KJ
 H- Q105
 D- AKJ64
 C- Q82

West leads the heart two against 3NT, and the defense takes four heart tricks, South discarding the two of clubs on the fourth heart. West then exits with a diamond, and South rattles off five fast diamond tricks. On the fifth diamond West must decide whether to blank the club king or throw a spade. Meanwhile, East has played the eight and seven of diamonds, a redundant message saying that he has an even number of spades. That makes it easy for West to throw a spade instead of blanking the club king. Showing a count of the diamond suit would be pointless in this situation.

Periscope applies only when declarer obviously has most of the remaining tricks. Similar signals are usually suit-preference or attitude when the defenders still have prospects for more than one trick.

Alarm Clock Signals

When a defender wants to alert partner to some abnormal situation, or to have him make an abnormal play, or both, he "wakes up" partner by playing in a non-standard fashion. We define "normal" plays as those that preserve one's trick-taking ability. In positions offering a choice, unblocking and overtaking are therefore abnormal plays that can be requested by an alarm clock signal. Playing honor cards in reverse order is a typical alarm clock signal:

A common case of alarm clock signaling comes when partner must be advised whether to unblock or not. The normal play of high cards warns partner not to unblock, abnormal asks that he do so. Example:

QJ (dummy)

AK932

South is declarer and East is on lead, in a "cash-out" situation where East-West must immediately grab what tricks they can. East wants West to unblock the 10 if he has it, so he makes the abnormal play of ace, then king. With only AK8xx, East plays the normal king, then ace, whereupon West should not play the 10 (but may choose to unblock when holding 109.., hoping partner has the 8, if three tricks won't be sufficient).

Q??

AK??

West leads a low card against 3NT. If East has the AKJ or AKJ10 and West Qxxxx there is no problem, since declarer's play will tell West what to do. However, suppose East has AK doubleton and West Qxxxxx. Then East should play the ace third hand, followed by the king. This abnormal (alarm clock) play should alert West to play a suit preference card on the king.

Or suppose East has AKJxx. Again he should play the ace, then king, an alarm clock signal telling West to unblock the queen if he started with Qxx, either having led from it or merely following suit to East's lead. (Presumably West can tell this is not from a doubleton AK). East cannot win the king and underlead the ace, because South could have Qx in the suit. If East had started with AKxxx and a quick side entry, he would play the normal king, then ace, and West should not unblock (the abnormal play) with Qxx. With no side entry he would have to lead a low card after winning the king, praying that South does not have a singleton queen at this point. Better yet, he should win with the ace, a falsecard, and return his lowest card. If South has Q10x he will probably go wrong.

Another example:

	J10	
985		KQ764
	A32	

West leads the 8 of this unbid major against 3NT (the 9 would imply 109). East should play the king, not the queen, on the first trick. When he follows with the queen, West knows to unblock the 9. Playing the queen first would warn against unblocking, which would be fatal if the 7 and 3 were exchanged.

Discarding from a Sequence

When discarding a card that is part of a three-or-more-card sequence, throw the card you would play when leading the suit. This applies to interior sequences also; throw the 10 from Q1098, K1098, A1098, AJ109 or KJ109, promising higher card(s). From AK(Q) or better, throw the ace, not the king. The king therefore shows KQJ(x). As usual, the jack is thrown from J109.., indicating no higher card.

Discarding From the Suit You Have Led

- After leading high from three or five small, discard the highest card you can spare, preferably the top card (present count).
- After leading high from four small, discard the lowest card (present count).
- After leading from a sequence, show present count if possible. Lead king from KQ1093, discard 10 next (four cards left). Without the 9, discard the 3 (three cards left).

After Following Suit from the Bottom of a Sequence

After following suit from the bottom of a sequence, play the top of the sequence if you can spare it. After following with the 9 from QJ109, throw the queen when discarding from the suit.

After Giving an Attitude Signal

Continue the signal on the next round of the suit, whether high-low or low-high..

After Giving a Count Signal

It is often necessary to clarify a count signal on the second round of the suit. In general we use the “present count” method:

(1) Having shown an even number of cards (playing the highest that can be spared), with an original four cards play the lowest card next (high-low). From 9862 play the 9 and then the 2. Playing the 9 and then the 8 would show a doubleton..

(2) Having shown an odd number of cards (lowest played first), with an original three play the higher of the two on the next round. After playing the 2 from 962, play the 9. With an original five play the “present count” principle isn’t used, because playing high might be taken as showing an original three, so play the original fourth-best next. After playing the 2 from 98742, play the 4 on the next round. This should usually be easy for partner to read.

(3) With an original holding of six or more cards, subtract four from the total and use the above methods.

LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

Leading on Your Own

When leading a suit that partner has not bid:

-- Lead second best from a sequence headed by an honor:

K from AKx, AKQ, AKJ (but ace from AK), or KQ doubleton

Q from KQx, KQ10, KQJ, (and AKQ if partner has raised)

J from QJx, QJ9, QJ10, QJ

10 from J10x, J108, J109, J10

9 from 109x, 1097, 1098, 109

Leading second from a sequence has some advantages, but one consequence is that the lead of the honor from Qx, Jx, or 10x (unattractive leads in any case) must be especially avoided. The result could be disastrous if you lead the honor and partner plays you for the next higher honor.

The reason for leading the queen from the AKQ in a suit partner has raised is to let him show the jack if he has it. He signals this possibly valuable entry by playing second highest (or the jack from J10) when he sees your queen. If the king were led, he would need the queen to play a high card. Don't lead the queen if partner has not raised the suit, as it then becomes more likely you will want to know his length in the suit.

-- Lead top from doubleton ace or king.

-- Lead low from weak doubletons. This includes Qx, Jx, and 10x but lead the queen from Qx if dummy has shown a strong hand (and declarer a weak one). Of course it is better not to lead from such holdings at all. Lead high from a weak doubleton if not interested in a ruff (e.g., you have QJ10 of trumps). In partner's suit only, lead the 10 from 10x.

-- Lead top from three small, play the middle card next. If the top card is a 9, lead the middle card as the 9 looks like a lead from 109. Besides, leading the 9 without the 8 could cost a trick (e.g., declarer has A8x and J10 doubleton is in dummy). On the second round play the card below the one led, denying an original doubleton.

-- Lead fourth-best from an honor (which includes the 10), lowest from three to the queen or better.

-- Lead the middle card from 9xx, 10xx, and Jxx (even J98). Leading from jack-third, especially from J98 (the 9 usually promises the 10), is dangerous and should be avoided.

-- From four or more small cards, usually lead "top of nothing," but lead second-best if the top card is the 9.

-- From an interior sequence, lead the top of the sequence:

J from KJ10 10 from K109 or Q109

Usually an interior sequence must be headed by an honor if the top of the sequence is to be led. Lead the 8, not the 9, from Q98 or K98. The 9 strongly implies a lead from 109... The only exception is the lead of the 9 from J98, not an attractive lead in any case. Playing 8, then 9, promises third round control, either a doubleton or from the king or queen.

For an explanation of why the top of an interior sequence is led, see the chapter “Marvin vs Journalist” at the end of this book.

Some comments about opening suit leads:

When the jack is led and the queen is visible, partner must have KJ10.

The lead of the 10 shows K, Q, or J. If you can see:

K and Q, partner has J

K and J, partner has Q

Q and J, partner has K

Situations that are bad for the system (none is necessarily fatal):

```

xxxx
?J10           Axxx
               ?x

```

West leads the jack. East wins ace but doesn't know whether to continue or switch. Does West have QJ10 or KJ10? (But a lead from KJ10 is rare.)

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Qxx or Kxx
?109(x)       Axxx
               ?x(x)

```

West leads the 10 and East has to decide whether or not to duck. Who has what? In deciding, East must consider that declarer will always get one trick in the suit if he has Jx or Jxx, whereas playing the ace will probably cost a trick if declarer has the king or queen. The decision must be made on the basis of whether it looks like tricks must be grabbed fast or not, and whether partner is likely to have an entry (to lead through again, when the lead is from J109).

Leading Partner's Suit

When leading a suit partner has shown, lead the top of a sequence (but king from AKx). Rusinow is not used in partner's suit. Lead the honor from any doubleton honor (including 10x). Otherwise lead the card you would have led if partner had not bid the suit.

Suits that partner has “shown” include those shown by a transfer, unusual notrump, etc., and a major suit the possession of which is strongly implied by a takeout double of the other major suit.

Occasionally, for tactical reasons, an unsupported high honor may be led when holding three or more cards in the suit. The most common reason is to get a look at the dummy while holding the lead. A good time for this is when the high card in partner's suit is your only likely winner, and partner may need a lead of some other suit through dummy. A high lead may work well when dummy has bid notrump, indicating a stopper in partner's suit. Leading the queen from Qxx(x) may catch a king in dummy. Do this only when you have raised the suit.

Leading Trumps

Lead low from two small.

Lead high from a doubleton jack, but this is led only when a trump *must* be led.

Lead middle from three unless the middle card is an important one (e.g., lead x from J9x). After leading the middle card, usually play the lowest card next, following the convention of high-lowing in trumps when holding three.

Lead fourth-best from four or more small cards, just as you play lowest card from four trumps when following suit.

Lead top of a sequence unless deception is involved (e.g., lead 9 from 109x). From J10x leading the jack could cost a trick if partner has the singleton queen (ace in dummy) or singleton king (queen in dummy) while leading low could cost a trick if dummy has Qx or Kx and partner has Ax. You have to judge which situation might apply.

THIRD-HAND PLAY AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

When Partner Leads an Honor

If there is an honor in dummy that is possibly finessable by means of the card partner led, Scanian signals apply. See section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense.

Showing Attitude

When the lead is the queen (from KQ..), a high card shows possession of the jack or ace, not a doubleton.

If the lead is the king of a suit that third hand has raised, play second highest (or queen from QJ) when holding the queen. Otherwise play the lowest card. Do not try to show count.

If the lead is the queen of suit that third hand has raised, play second-highest (or jack from J10) when holding the jack. Otherwise play the lowest card. Do not try to show count.

Showing Count

Playing high-low on partner's lead of the king, then ace, of a suit you have not raised asks shows a doubleton. When dummy has the queen with length and you don't want the suit continued, you must nevertheless play high from a doubleton. Playing low would show a singleton. It is very unethical to think and then play low from a doubleton, telling partner it is not a singleton. With three or more cards, play the lowest: negative attitude, not count, and not suit preference (usually).

Against a slam, third hand should give count, not attitude, so partner can tell whether the ace will cash. If you have shown at least three cards by a raise during the auction, it's also right to show count when the queen is in dummy: high with an even number, lowest from an odd number. Do this also when declarer is known to have seven or more trumps, making it likely that he is short in the suit led..

Jxx

Q led

Axx(x)(x)

West leads the queen (from KQ) and will know that East has the ace when it holds. East should signal count, not attitude, playing high with four and low with three or five.

K73

Q1042

J85

A96

If declarer plays dummy's king on the lead of the 2, West will know that East has the jack. East should therefore show count with the 5 rather than play the 8 or the jack (which would show an even number of cards).

When signaling from a suit known to contain at least six cards, choose a card that indicates length as well as attitude. E.g., play the 9 to encourage with seven cards, the 8 with six cards.

The King/Queen Play to the Lead of the Ace

When an ace is led against a suit contract and third hand is known to have length in the suit:

- If he plays the queen, he demands a shift
- If he plays the king, he demands a continuation (even with a singleton in dummy)
- To merely suggest a shift or a continuation, do not follow with the king or the queen.

Queen Play to the Lead of the King

As is well known, the play of the queen under partner's lead of the king from AK shows the ability to win the next trick, either by ruffing or with the jack. This can be helpful when declarer doesn't want to win the second trick in his hand.

Some say the queen *demand*s an underlead of the ace. This is too unimaginative. If the opening leader sees a better line of defense he should feel free to follow that path. With QJ third hand should play the queen without having a particular reason, as the leader may be able to make good use of this information.

This means you usually must not play the queen from Qx when partner leads the king. If the jack is in dummy, however, it's okay to play high-low and this does not necessarily show a singleton.

Showing Suit Preference

As a general rule third hand cannot give a suit-preference signal on an opening lead won by the leader. A high card means continue, a low card means don't continue. A singleton in dummy does not mean the leader should automatically switch, as third hand may prefer forcing dummy to ruff. This could be either to protect a trump holding or to avoid a dangerous shift to another suit. Sometimes third hand's low card just shows no interest in a continuation and is not a suit-preference signal.

When declarer wins, or will win, the opening lead and both defenders can see there is no future in the suit, suit preference has priority over a pointless cover. Say the lead is from three cards and declarer plays dummy's 9 from KQ9. Holding 108732, play the 8 or the 2 for suit preference rather than mindlessly covering the 9. Cover only with no preference for either side suit.

Another reason for not covering or playing third-hand high is to avoid giving the leader an impression that you have strength in the suit. Partner leads a low card and declarer plays low from dummy's K82. Do not play high from small cards, which may give partner the impression that you have a good holding such as AJ109 when declarer wins the queen. Just play low the 6 from 9765.

CONTINUATIONS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

Continuations of the Suit You Led

-- Having led an honor:

After an opening lead of second highest from a sequence, play the bottom of the sequence next if you won't mind if partner unblocks. Continuing with the bottom of a sequence suggests that partner play his highest card, usually for unblocking purposes, while continuing with the highest card warns him not to make any unblocking or overtaking play.

After leading queen from KQx, play the king next (and partner had better not overtake with the ace when lacking the jack!). After leading queen from KQJ9, play the jack next, and partner can overtake if he wants to (and must play the 10, if he has it). It is therefore the convention that one should play the king on second round from KQJ when it is desirable to hold the lead. Similarly, leading the jack and continuing with the queen tends to show an original holding of QJx, not QJ10, so the leader from QJ10 can continue with the queen when desirous of holding the lead. Continuing with the 10 suggests that partner can overtake if he wishes.

After leading from a sequence, leading a low card that is not part of the sequence should give "present count." After leading queen from KQ32, lead the 2 next (bottom from an odd number). With KQ543, you lead 5 next, high from an even number.

When holding the opening lead, then leading low in response to partner's encouraging signal, do not lead the (standard) original fourth best. Instead, lead a higher card with four or six remaining, and the lowest card from three or five remaining. E.g., After leading the queen from KQ863, holding the trick, lead the 8 to show four remaining. The standard lead of the 6 would leave partner wondering who has the 3.

-- Having led fourth best

After leading 3 from J9632 play the 2 next. With a six card suit, after leading fourth best, make your first discard (or play to another's winner) the highest card you can afford. Otherwise partner may figure you for an original five-card suit. Playing up requires partner to distinguish between an original four-or-six card holding, easier than a four-or-five situation. Note that this is not a "present count" situation.

-- Having led top of nothing from a three-card holding

Play the middle card on the second round (present count). Playing the bottom card might look like an original fourth-best lead from a five-card holding.

-- Having led the middle from three small (e.g., 8 from 98x)

Play the lowest card next. This is not present count, but playing low-up implies an original doubleton or three to an honor.

Returning Partner's Lead

Having started a count signal on the opening lead, by all means complete the signal when returning the second round of the suit.

When there is no signal to complete and the situation logically calls for a return that shows count, show present count by leading high from a doubleton and low from three or more (the original fourth-best card)

What situations logically call for count? These:

- 1) The location of meaningful high cards is known before the lead, so attitude is not necessary.
- 2) The location of meaningful high cards will be known after the current trick, on which no decision must be made by leader's partner.
- 3) The defenders are in a cash-out situation, when count is often more important than attitude.

LATER LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

When leading a suit later in the play, including a switch after holding the opening lead, do not use Rusinow because leads from unsupported honors are too frequently called for. Most of the guidelines in section 1-4, Later Leads Against Notrump Contracts, under the heading Tactical Considerations, can be applied to suit contracts.

When ruffing is a possibility, lead the lower card from a doubleton (as suggested for opening leads), but switch to high-low otherwise.

There are times when you do not want a continuation of the suit that you break, but the normal lead doesn't say that.. Example, N-S vulnerable:

S- Q1087	
H- AK	
D- 874	
C- AKJ10	
S- A5	S- 62
H- 5	H- QJ10874
D- KQJ532	D- A106
C- J874	C- 52
S- KJ943	
H- 9632	
D- 9	
C- Q93	

South plays in 5S after East has bid hearts and raised West's diamonds to 5D as a save. West leads the heart five, East plays the queen (suit preference), and South plays the heart six (hiding the 32). When West gets in with the ace of trumps, he leads the diamond queen, marking the diamond king with South. East has nothing better to do now than win and lead another heart. After trumping this, West can try more diamonds. If West had led the diamond king, showing KQ, East would have no way of knowing that he must overtake and lead a heart back in order to save the game. In fact, the diamond king denies that the heart lead was a singleton.

Special Situations

Holding AQx(x) of a suit that you have not bid, a suit in which it is obvious your side must try for three tricks, do *not* play ace, then queen, if trumps have not been pulled. Playing AQ shows a doubleton in that situation, and partner would be justified in overtaking the queen with the king and leading a third round for you to ruff. With AQx(x) therefore, the correct lead is a low card, not the ace. If you want partner to take the third trick, lead the queen, then ace, then low (if you're sure he has at least three cards in the suit!).

When underleading an ace to partner's presumed king in a cash-out situation, show count (he will know you have the ace): low from an odd number of cards, high from an even number. When underleading a king to partner's presumed ace, lead low to show attitude (unless you want another suit led), regardless of the number of cards, because he won't know who has the king. Or if count is important, lead the unsupported king, whereupon partner should give count because his ace is known.

SECOND HAND PLAY AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

Everything in this section assumes that false-carding is not involved. False-carding and (when important) count have priority over any other possible significance of a card played second hand.

Splitting Honors

For the correct play when splitting honors, see section 1-5, Second Hand Play Against Notrump Contracts. The only difference is that one can more freely split with three-card solidity instead of four (e.g., Q109x instead of Q1098) when the fourth round of the suit is of no interest. Splitting with Q109x, K109x, J109x, etc., is usually unwise in a notrump contract because partner will assume you can win the fourth round of the suit and may try to set it up for you.

When a singleton is led from dummy, splitting a two-card sequence (e.g., J10x, QJx) is usual.

When declarer has a long suit in hand, leads from dummy which has either a singleton or no entry for a second lead, fourth seat may have the ace-third and not know whether to take declarer's king when he plays it. Partner helps in this decision by playing the jack from certain holdings to tell partner to take the trick. The general rule is to win the trick if second hand plays the jack, but duck otherwise. Mnemonic is "Take the Jake."

Examples	West	East (second hand)	
(1)	Axx	Jx	The x is played and West must duck the king
(2)	Axx	QJ	The jack is played and West must take the king
(3)	Axx	J10	The 10 is played and West must duck the king

The indicated plays are the only ones that give declarer a guess.

SIGNALS IN SUIT CONTRACT DEFENSE

Many signals used in notrump defense are also applicable to suit contract defense. See section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense. Section 1-2, Third Hand Play Against Suit Contracts, includes some of the signaling appropriate to third hand play.

The Odds in Signaling

A familiar situation has the opening leader with AK-fifth, dummy with Q-fifth, and partner holds either a singleton or a doubleton. The odds are these: If partner plays the lowest card, then it has to be a singleton, of course, and if he plays the middle card, it's 50-50. If he plays the highest of the three cards out, however, it is two-to-one that it's a singleton. This is a restricted-choice situation. If declarer has a singleton, he must play it, but if he has the two lower cards he will play either at random, so it's two-to-one that he has a doubleton.

Another familiar situation has the queen being led from KQx or KQ10 and partner must signal whether he has the jack. The general rule is "pay off to the less-likely cases."

Let's start with the leader West holding KQ109 with A86 in dummy, with missing spot cards of 75432, and declarer has denied four cards in the suit. After the queen lead is ducked, West wants to know who has the jack.

The playable cards for East are 75432. The 7 and the 5 are obviously encouraging, the 2 obviously discouraging. The 4 could be from J43, J42, or 754, so it's two to one that East has the jack. The 3 could be from J32, 753, 743, or 543, making it three to one that East lacks the jack. If you pay off to the less likely cases, going wrong on just two of them, you will be ahead most of the time.

If West's hearts are weaker, say KQ9x, first of all East will never play the 10 because declarer could have J9x, and he will always play the jack from J10. The only "bad" cases are when East has J32 or 1054 (754 is impossible because declarer would win the trick holding J10). That being so, the odds work out the same as in the previous case, even though West has only four playable spot cards instead of five. Assume that the three highest cards are encouraging, the two lowest discouraging.

Now suppose declarer is known to have four or five cards in the suit, and East therefore two or three, with only four possible spot cards to play, let's say 5432. The 5 is plainly encouraging, while the 2 is usually discouraging but could be from J2, which is only one possibility out of five. The second-highest 4 is three-to-one encouraging, and the second-lowest 3 is three-to-two discouraging. Therefore you continue if either of the two highest is played, but switch if either of the two lowest is played.

Next try it with six playable spot cards, as when the leader has KQ10 and the dummy A86, leaving playable spot cards of 975432. If declarer has denied four cards in the suit, it's impossible for East's signal to be ambiguous, even with J432 or 9754. As soon as declarer plays a card he gives the show away, making one of those holdings impossible.

If declarer is known to have four or five cards in the suit, and East therefore two or three, East could play encouraging from J97, J95, J95, J93, J92, J75, J74, J73, J72, J54, J53, J52, J43, J42, J32, and discouraging

from 97, 95, 94, 93, 92, 75, 74 73, 72, 54, 53, 52, 43, 42, 32, 975, 954, 953, 952, 875, 874, 873, 874, 873, 872, 754, 753, 752, 543, 532, or 432.

Ignoring doubleton jacks for the moment, the 9 is always encouraging, the 7 encouraging 4 to 1, the 5 is even-even, and lower cards are more likely discouraging than encouraging.

The doubleton jack can be J9, J7, J5, J4, J3, or J2, which means that the 5 is no longer even-even, and therefore can be considered encouraging. The other doubletons do not change the odds enough to be significant.

Conclusion: When there are six playable cards and declarer could have four or more cards in the suit, consider the three highest as encouraging, the three lowest as discouraging.

When declarer is known to have exactly four cards, East having three, the 9 and 7 are always encouraging, the 5 is three-to-one encouraging, and the lower cards figure to be discouraging. That makes for the same rule, figure the top three cards to be encouraging, the bottom three to be discouraging.

I have not considered a lead from KQx with Axx in dummy when declarer may have four or five cards, but the odds are probably about the same as with KQ10.

A General Rule

It seems we have found a general rule that works in all these cases: Divide the playable cards as evenly as possible, but put a middle one in the top half. A card played from the top half figures to be encouraging, one from the bottom half discouraging.

Signaling in the Trump Suit

The general rule is to high-low with three trumps, play up with two or four. If you are anxious that partner not try to give you a ruff (e.g., when ruffing would cost a trump trick), don't high-low.

A more advanced trump signaling device is a combination of Smith echo (see the notrump defense signaling chapter) and suit preference. It goes like this:

In general, playing the highest trump on the first round indicates that you liked partner's lead (or your own lead) and wish that suit to be continued. Playing the lowest indicates a dislike of that suit.

When it is obvious whether or not you liked the opening lead, given the cards played to the first trick and the cards remaining in dummy, then trumps are used to indicate suit preference for the other two suits. If you have no preference, or prefer the lower suit, play the lower of two trumps first. This ambiguous play only indicates no interest in the higher suit, while playing the top card first unambiguously shows preference for the higher suit. With three trumps, play the middle trump first to show neutrality between the other two suits. Playing the highest next indicates a leaning toward the higher suit, while playing the lowest indicates either a preference for the lower suit or continued neutrality.

Other subtleties may be introduced by noting that there are 12 ways to play three trumps and 24 ways to play four trumps. Assigning meanings to each is "left as an exercise for the reader."

Falsecarding takes preference over any signaling. For instance, holding 102 over dummy's KJ93 of trumps, you may want to falsecard with the 10 when declarer plays the ace. Such a falsecard has no signaling significance. The same applies to cards that must be played for tactical reasons (e.g., splitting a sequence to ensure a trick).

Periscope Signals

For a discussion periscope signals, see section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense. Here is an example in suit play:

	S- KJ2	
	H- Q74	
	D- K6	
	C- A8763	
S- AQ743		S-9865
H- 8		H- ---
D- AQ109		D- 7532
C- J105		C- KQ942
	S-10	
	H- AKJ106532	
	D- J84	
	C- ---	

South	West	North	East
--	1♠	Dbl(?)	4♠
6♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

West leads the ♦A, and East should play the ♦7 to show an even number of spades. Then West knows that the ♠A won't get ruffed. Playing the diamond deuce as suit preference doesn't work very well!

Alarm Clock Signals

Alarm clock signals, abnormal plays to wake partner up to the fact that he should do something abnormal, were discussed in section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense. Such signals can be used in the defense of suit contracts as well. Example:

	J32	
A654		KQ
	10876	

With South declarer and East on lead during the play of a suit contract, the way for East-West to take three fast tricks in the suit shown (assuming West has no immediate side entry) is for East to lead the queen, then the king. This abnormal play should alert West that he should overtake the king (an abnormal action) and give East a ruff.

Another example is leading ace, then king, from a suit you have bid, which might say, "Trump this if you can...I have a side void!" Another common play with a void is the non-standard underlead from a known six-card or longer suit, hoping to find partner with a fast entry in the suit. The size of the card led is suit-preference, signaling where the void lies. If you underlead AKQ1082 by leading the deuce, partner should

know what to do when his jack unexpectedly holds the trick! The idea is that you do something unusual when you want partner to do something unusual.

The All-Gone Signal

When declarer is ruffing out your known long suit as part of elimination play, play your highest card in the suit to say "That's all!" (i.e., declarer has no more cards to ruff out). That will let partner know when the elimination is total, and that another round of the suit will give declarer a sluff-ruff.

Discarding from a Sequence

When discarding a card that is part of a three-or-more-card sequence, including an interior sequence, use the same rules as when discarding from such holdings against a notrump contract. See section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense.

Discarding From the Suit Led You Have Led

-- After leading from top of three or five small, discard the highest card you can spare, preferably the top card (present count).

-- After leading from top of four small, discard the lowest card (present count).

-- After leading from a sequence, show present count. Lead queen from KQ1093, discard 10 next (four cards left). Without the 9, discard the 3 (three cards left).

After Following Suit from the Bottom of a Sequence

After following suit from the bottom of a sequence, play the top of the sequence if you can spare it. After following with the 9 from QJ109, throw the queen when discarding from the suit.

After Giving an Attitude Signal

Continue the signal on the next round of the suit, whether high-low or low-high.

After Giving a Count Signal

It is often necessary to clarify a count signal on the second round of the suit. In general we use the "present count" method:

(1) Having shown an even number of cards (playing the highest that can be spared), with an original four cards play the lowest card next (high-low). From 9862 play the 9 and then the 2. Playing the 9 and then the 8 would show a doubleton.

(2) Having shown an odd number of cards (lowest played first), with an original three play the higher of the two on the next round. After playing the 2 from 962, play the 9. With an original five play the "present count" principle isn't used, because playing high might be taken as showing an original three, so play the original fourth-best next. After playing the 2 from 98742, play the 4 on the next round. This should usually be easy for partner to read.

(3) With an original holding of six or more cards, subtract four from the total and use the above methods.

MARVIN VS JOURNALIST

Journalist leads against suit contracts feature Rusinow leads (king from AK, queen from QJ, 10 from J10, 9 from 109), including the lead of the ten from KJ10 and the 9 from K109 or Q109.

"Journalist" (Jeff Rubens) once wrote: "There is no way to improve efficiency when leading from interior sequences without introducing (what we consider) a greater loss somewhere else." That statement bears checking. Rubens assumes that the alternative is playing the 10 or 9 as "zero or two higher," which is not compatible with Rusinow leads. There is a third approach, however, which I modestly call "Marvin."

Marvin leads second best from sequences, a la Rusinow, but leads the top of an interior sequence. Let's examine the situations in which the difference may matter:

	Kxx	
J109x or Q109x		Axxx
	Qx or Jx	

Journalist leads the 10 from J109 and 9 from Q109, so third seat can't go wrong. Marvin leads the 10 from both holdings and third seat doesn't know if it's from J109 or Q109. She may lose her ace if she ducks. Plus for Journalist (although with Jx declarer always gets one trick in the suit).

	Qxx	
K109x		Axxx
	Jx	

This is a similar case. Declarer will always get one trick in the suit, but if Marvin's partner plays declarer for Kxx and ducks the lead of the 10, the defense could lose one or two of its tricks. Plus for Journalist, who knows not to duck when the 9 is led.

	AJx	
1098x		Kxx
	Qxx	

Journalist leads the 9 and third seat doesn't know who has the queen. Usually he will duck and maybe get the trick later. Or maybe not. Marvin also leads the 9 but his partner knows to play the king. Plus for Marvin.

	Axx	
K109x		Jxx
	Qxx	

A similar case: plus for Marvin.

	xxx	
1098x or K109x		QJx
	AKx or Axx	

Journalist leads the 9 from both holdings, while Marvin leads differently. When declarer wins the ace, Marvin's partner knows who has the king. Plus for Marvin.

	AQx (or AJx)	
K109x		xxx
	Jxx (or Qxx)	

When declarer wins the trick in his hand, Marvin's partner knows who has the king (helping to place declarer's points). Journalist's does not. Small plus for Marvin.

	xxx	
K109x		AJx
	Qxx	

Marvin's partner will continue the suit after winning the ace, but Journalist's may play declarer for KQx and switch. Plus for Marvin.

	Qxx	
KJ10x		Axx
	xxx	

Journalist leads the 10 and third seat may fear to duck. Marvin leads the jack and third seat knows he has the king. Plus for Marvin.

Another plus is that the 9 lead is no longer ambiguous, as it shows the 10 and nothing else. There are many combinations where this can be important, so I won't show them.

Well, Marvin has more pluses than Journalist. Of course the situations are not all of equal importance, which must be taken into account. Maybe some significant combinations have been missed, such as when dummy is void of the suit. Another ignored factor is that these leads could be from a short suit. Analysis of all that "is left as an exercise for the reader."