

MORE ON DEFENSE (AGAINST SUITS)

by Maritha Pottenger

Trump Echo: When you are following suit in trumps, you use the REVERSE of normal count signals. Thus, with 3 trumps, you play your *middle* or *highest* trump first (assuming you are not sacrificing an important spot card), then your *lowest* trump. Partner then knows that you have one more trump. This can be very important if partner needs to choose between giving you one more ruff or attacking another suit.

Leading Against Suits: Decide what type of dummy is likely to appear and choose your lead accordingly.

- 1) *Will dummy have a long, strong side suit?* If so, you must make an aggressive lead, such as underleading a King or even a King Jack combination.
- 2) *Is dummy likely to be short in a side suit and trumping it?* If so, lead a trump.
- 3) *Is dummy likely to be fairly balanced and the opponents have struggled to their contract?* If so, a passive lead (a trump or top of nothing) is apt to be best.

Other questions to consider when leading against suit contracts:

- 1) **Have the opponents pointedly avoided no trump?** If they end up in 5 of a minor while bidding 3 suits along the way, it is generally right to lead the unbid suit—even if you have AQxx or KJxxx or another holding from which one generally does NOT lead. They don't have a stopper or they would be playing 3NT.
- 2) **Did your partner have a chance to overcall at the one level and fail to do so?** Chances are s/he doesn't have much in that suit, particularly if the auction marks him/her with some HCP on the bidding. Try another suit.
- 3) **Has your partner bid a suit?** Lead your partner's suit (unless you are void). Rules for leading your partner's suit:
 - a. With any two cards, lead the higher.
 - b. With the Ace and any number of cards below it, lead the Ace.
 - c. With three cards to an honor, lead your lowest card. (Tens count as honors.) **Exception:** if Dummy bid NT after partner bid the suit, lead your highest card (to finesse against Dummy's honor).
 - d. With three or four small, lead the TOP card (denying an honor) when you have supported the suit. Partner knows you have at least 3 cards in the suit because you raised. If you have not raised partner, decide whether you are leading small from 3 or 4 small cards (helps count hand) or HIGHEST (denies possession of an honor). There are advantages/disadvantages to both.
 - e. With touching honors, lead the higher.
 - f. With four (or more) cards to an honor, lead 4th best.
 - g. Occasionally, when you are very weak, and the bidding suggests it is right, you might want to lead king when holding Kxxx or Kxxxx. The reason is, you are hoping to win that trick and see dummy in case you need to make a killing shift from your side of the table. Dummy or Declarer might have a singleton and partner will not be able to get you in again.
- 4) **Are the opponents obviously sacrificing?** If so, lead a trump. You and your partner have the HCP power, so you want to cut down on the ruffing the opponents can do.
- 5) **A short suit lead** (singleton, doubleton) can work well, especially if you have trump control and at least one left to ruff with (Ax or Kxx, etc.) If you have a lot of strength, a singleton is more likely to backfire because partner cannot have much and therefore unlikely to have an entry to give you a ruff.
- 6) **Leading from touching honors (sequence of three is ideal; two is OK) is usually the best lead.**
- 7) **Underleading an Ace at a suit contract is highly inadvisable. You often lose a trick.**

Remember: COUNT (distribution of suits) and number of tricks you need to set the contract. That will often lead you to the best action. Against 4 of a major, think: "How can we take four tricks?"