

Tips for the improver – opening leads – part 4

This article focuses on the choices to be made when there is little evidence which might signpost your choice from the bidding, eg 1NT – 3NT. All you know is that opener has an average of the points announced by the responder and responder has the number of points required to make the total 25 or more. They haven't used Stayman or a transfer sequence so you are choosing more or less 'blind'.

At this point I am not suggesting you shut your eyes and stab your index finger towards a card and select that. Rather, you should consider other factors such as the strength of your best suit and the availability of entries to allow you to cash out once the suit is established. Take this example:

North
S A8
H 843
D AK1095
C 984

Before reading on, make your selection and make a note of it together with the reasoning for your choice. Now, assuming you have decided to lead a diamond, let's look at each of the possibilities:

- **D9** – the fourth best from your longest and strongest suit. Not the worst but not the best choice. Give declarer Qx in dummy and Jxxx in hand this could give declarer a second diamond trick particularly if declarer plays on spades first knocking out your entry.
- **D10** – top of an interior sequence and has the same disadvantage as **D9**.
- **DA** – probably the best choice as you keep open the possibility of finding dummy (or your partner) with Jx or Qx, allowing you to clear the suit before your spade entry is removed.

One other point on this choice: some partnerships have an understanding (shown on their convention cards) that the lead of a king against a NT contract requests partner to unblock any honour held. In that case the correct lead would have been **DK**.

Now suppose the hand above is changed to:

North
S 98
H 843
D AK1095
C 984

It's almost the same but I have inserted **S9** instead of **SA**. Now you don't have the 'luxury' of the outside entry and you must rely on your partner having an entry and a second diamond to lead when he gets in. Accordingly, the correct lead is now **D9**. **D10** would achieve the same effect but might cause your partner not to place you with both A and K and to switch when he gains the lead, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory!

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