

Ultimate Defence 03

As mentioned earlier, there is a huge difference between opening leads against TRUMP contracts and NO TRUMPS. Also, the level of the contract makes a difference. For now, let me go over the card combinations that you were given last time, and we can see the differences between opening leads against trump and No Trump contracts.

a) A K 8 4 3; b) A K 8 3; c) A K 3; d) A 9 5 3; e) A 9 3; f) A 3

If you're defending against No Trumps, you will, as a rule, start by leading your 'longest and strongest' suit. If you are able to establish tricks in the suit and gain the lead, these tricks will be sure ones because there is no trump suit that can stop you taking your established tricks. On the other hand, if you have a long and strong suit but are defending a trump contract, then establishing 'deep' tricks will do you little good because declarer will have control with whatever suit is trumps. Even if you have a suit like AKQJ10 there is not much chance that you will be able to take more than two tricks before declarer trumps in.

The basic idea to work on is: against NO TRUMPS, develop your tricks, even if you have to lose early tricks to establish later ones. Against TRUMP contracts, your tricks have to come much quicker and you cannot afford to lose early ones unless it helps you establish second or third round tricks for the defence. While that may be a simplification, let's look at this in practice.

Example a) is a great example, because it shows the big difference in leading against trump and No Trump contracts. Against No Trumps, in normal circumstances you will need to develop tricks, which means losing early ones. Even with a great suit like you have here, you expect to lose a trick in it, so lead a LOW card to start. The recommended lead for us is 'fourth highest', which is the four. If you start with the top cards, you will almost certainly find that you have no way of regaining the lead unless you have a sure fire entry in a side suit. But if you start with a low one, as long as PARTNER has more than one card in the suit, no matter which of your partnership wins a trick during the play, you will then be able to try your good suit from the top. In normal circumstances, after you have taken the ace and king, the eight and three will also be tricks. Another consideration in leading the suit against No Trumps is that partner may have just two cards in the suit, the QUEEN and another. By starting with the ace, you have BLOCKED the suit. Yes, there are times when you start with the lead of the four and declarer makes a doubleton queen, but you will gain far more often by losing early tricks against No Trumps. But if opponents foolishly bid to 6NT, I hope you will have the sense to take your two top tricks!

Against a TRUMP contract, the exact opposite applies. You don't expect to be able to take more tricks in the suit than your ace and king, but who knows? If your partner has only one or two cards in it, partner may be able to ruff the third round AFTER you have taken your ace and king. So, there may well be three potential tricks in the suit, via a ruff. Once dummy goes down and your partner has to follow, that is where SIGNALLING comes into play and we will talk about that at a later stage. Suffice to say at this stage that you should lead LOW against No Trumps, and HIGH against a trump contract.

Example b) is very much the same, but with one significant difference. The lead of the ace against a trump contract is even more attractive because, with only four cards, you just might be lucky and be able to take at least two tricks in the suit. Partner will be able to signal to tell you how to proceed after viewing dummy. Against a No Trump contract, leading the ace might turn out to be better than a low one, because you will be able to get a signal from partner and still have the option of next leading your low one. You see, with only four cards in your hand, the chances of partner having more than two are definitely increased. I hope you can follow this reasoning. There is no sure fire answer to anything when it come to bridge, but you can increase your odds of success considerably by knowing the possibilities and thinking them through.

What about examples c to f? In c) you would be leading your SHORT suit against No Trumps. Unless you have reason to suspect that PARTNER might have length and strength in it, you would be better off to lead your own suit and hope the ace and king in this suit serve as entries for your own suit, i.e. declarer may have to develop that suit himself. Against a trump contract, the ace is still a good lead from this holding. In d), fourth highest against No Trumps of course. Against a trump contract, I suggest you don't lead this suit at all! Nor should you lead a suit like in e) whether there is a trump suit or not, unless it is the trump suit and you decide that leading trumps is a good idea, in which case start with the three. More on reasons for trump leads later!

Example f) belongs to trump contract defence only. Lead the ace in the hope that partner will have the king and be able to lead a third round which you can ruff. DON'T lead this suit against No Trumps under any circumstances!

a)K Q 8 4 3; b)K Q 8 3; c)K Q 3; d)K 8 4 3; e)K 4 3; f)K 3; g)K J 10 3; h)K J 3

When you don't have the ace but do have the king, either in combination with the queen or with low cards, the theme is much the same: in a) lead the four against No Trumps but lead the king against a trump contract. In b) you can decide whether to lead the king or the three against No Trumps, but definitely the KING against a suit contract. Do you see why? In c) lead the king, but against No Trumps, do so only if you think partner may have length in the suit. In d) lead the three against trump AND No Trump contracts. Leading from a suit like you have in e) or h) is generally not recommended, nor from Kx as in f). Leading from a suit like in g) against a trump contract is not a good idea. Against No Trumps, lead the JACK. That is the standard accepted lead from an 'interior sequence' such as AJ10x(x) or KJ10x(x) but it is more likely you'd want to lead the suit from a five card suit than four or three. Too much chance of giving tricks away if leading from such SHORT suits, with no compensation by way of possible development of a LONG suit.

When your highest card is the queen, you will be hoping for help from partner, or that you are in fact the one who will be helping partner. The same principles should apply as earlier: lead the queen when you have a good sequence or at least the jack with it, lead 'fourth highest' from a broken suit, and avoid leading from such suits as in e) and f) below

a)Q J 8 3; b)Q J 3; c)Q J 10 3; d)Q 10 4 3; e)Q 4 3; f)Q 3