

## Ultimate Defence 07

### Thinking and Planning

The first thing that you must learn is that you must decide which suit you will lead, based on your total holding in all the suits, and only then should you decide which card to lead based on your holding in the suit.

Secondly, you should know that leading against a *trump* contract and leading against a *No Trump* contract are two completely different things, with different strategies required.

The major difference is that against No Trump contracts, your long suit will come in handy if you get a chance to use it properly. But, unless your suit is solid, or your partner contributes the missing card or cards, you must expect to lose a trick or two early in order that you can enjoy the tricks that your side has in the suit. With luck, this may be only one trick lost and three or four gained, but it may take longer than that.

Against a trump contract, though, because opponents have chosen a suit as trumps, it is wishful thinking if you expect any of your low cards to ever become tricks. It is therefore important that you take, or develop, quick tricks whenever possible. You will, as in the earlier example, still not wave your unsupported aces in the air, but you will take an ace (if the bidding tells you to!) if you hold the king as well. Or, you will lead your king if you have the queen as well, because at least when the king loses to the ace, your queen will be a trick, if you get a chance to take it.

So, while you would lead low from AKxxx against a No Trump contract, hoping that once you lose the first trick you will then have four later, you would never lead low from that holding against a trump contract. That is because declarer may make the queen, and your ace and king may run away because declarer has the trump control.

There are other good holdings to lead from that are equally good against both suit and No Trump contracts, for instance from QJ109 the queen is a great lead because:

a) dummy might have the king and partner the ace; b) partner may have the king and thereby set up whatever tricks you have after losing to the ace; or c) if declarer has both the ace and king, then one more round may set up a trick or two for you.

Similarly, leading low from e.g. KJxx will set up tricks for your side, whether against suit contracts or No Trumps, whenever partner has the ace or queen, but could be costly when partner has neither. That is why it is important to take note of the bidding, because that, in conjunction with your own hand, will give you a hint as to whether such a lead is a good one or not.

OK, let us quickly summarise the 'art of leading': Leading is not about following any set rules blindly, it is about taking notice of the bidding, and then planning a defence, and only then following the rules as to which card of the suit to lead. Even these rules sometimes need to be bent or broken, but they are there because they are the best rules for most circumstances.

So, how do you decide which suit to lead, much less which card to lead? If you try to imagine what declarer and dummy should hold if opponents' bidding is reasonably accurate, as well as how declarer might play the hand, you should get a pretty good idea of how you will defend. And you must also think about what partner might, or might not, have.

By and large, against No Trump contracts, you can decide to attack by leading your longest and strongest suit (hence the rule 'fourth highest of longest and strongest'), or you can make a safe lead which will give nothing away. You see, sometimes attack is the best form of defence, but other times defence is the best form of attack! The bidding should help you decide, but this will be more so when you start getting opponents who know how to bid properly!

Against a trump contract, there are more things you can look for, and the bidding is most important. You can look for extra tricks from your hand from ruffs, by leading your short suit, or look for ruffs in partner's hand by leading your long suit. Or, you can try to stop declarer making use of any ruffing power in dummy by starting, and persisting, with a trump. Or, you can try to attack declarer's trump holding by leading your own, or partner's, suit and forcing declarer to ruff at every opportunity until your side has more trumps than declarer. This only works if dummy is short of trumps.

All of this is easier said than done, but let's look at some recent deals and see what we can learn from them about making the best lead, given the opportunity. Some of the deals you will see are reasonably straightforward, even at the basic level of learning that we are at right now. Others are more complicated and the reader will need to return to them at a later stage to get the full significance. Whatever the case, the main thing is that your thought processes start to get stimulated to the extent that you can begin to visualise more than just what is right in front of you.

Let's just look at one deal for a start:

**Dealer North Nil Vul**

♠ 8 4  
 ♥ A Q J 6 5  
 ♦ A J 7  
 ♣ 10 6 2

♠ J 6 5 3  
 ♥ 4 3  
 ♦ K Q 4 3 2  
 ♣ 9 4

♠ 9 2  
 ♥ 8 7 2  
 ♦ 10 9 8  
 ♣ A K 8 7 3

♠ A K Q 10 7  
 ♥ K 10 9  
 ♦ 6 5  
 ♣ Q J 5

W	N	E	S
	1H	NB	1S
NB	2H	NB	4H
NB	NB	NB	

East is on lead against 4H by North. The clear cut lead is the ace of clubs. Neither of the opponents has bid the suit, so East hopes for at least two club tricks. Not only does the person with the opening lead have to work out a strategy, their partner has to cooperate by telling them how to proceed. That is where it is vital to employ SIGNALS.

We'll talk about signals later, but the basic signals need to be addressed immediately. West, by following with the nine, can tell East that East has struck gold on the opening lead.

The very basic, and most common, signalling system is: play the *higher* of two cards to tell your partner that you have *two* and play the *lowest* from *three*. If West follows with the nine, East knows that West has two only (or maybe even a singleton, though the bidding might have been different then!).

The basic concept is : HIGH, ENCOURAGE; LOW, DISCOURAGE, but more of that later. Here, when West plays the nine, East should know to lead two more rounds of the suit. Even if declarer drops the ten at trick one, trying to 'false card'. This might, without any signalling system from EW, deter East from continuing with the ace, expecting it to be ruffed by declarer if declarer had a singleton ten. You see, with a signalling system, East knows what to do before declarer has a chance to try and lead them astray! So, after three rounds of clubs, West ruffing the third, the defence have taken the first three tricks and need just one more.

West leads the king of diamonds and waits for the queen to make the setting trick. This, indeed, is what happened at the tables where East started with three rounds of clubs. But could declarer have made the contract despite the good defence? We'll see in the next instalment.