

MORE ON OPENING LEADS AGAINST NO TRUMP by Maritha Pottenger

The lead of an Ace does not often happen. It shows a very powerful holding—generally missing only one honor (such as AKQxx; AKJ10(x); AKJxx; AQJxx) and asks partner to unblock if partner has the missing honor. If partner does NOT have the missing honor, s/he is expected to show count (so partner will know whether that missing honor—presumably in Declarer’s hand if not visible in Dummy) is destined to fall or not. **EXCEPTION:** Lead Ace against a Gambling 3NT (to see Dummy); partner knows NOT to unblock.

The lead of a King is either from a sequence (KQJx; or KQ10x) or is a short-suit lead (e.g., KQx).

The lead of a queen is either from a sequence (QJ0x or QJ9x) or from the KQ109 combinations—in which case partner is expected to unblock the jack if s/he has it.

The lead of a jack is generally top of a sequence (J109x or J108x). In standard leads, the jack could also be a lead from the top of an interior sequence (KJ109 or AJ109). Some people play “jack denies”—a system in which the jack is never led from the interior sequence combinations. Instead, those people lead the 10.

The lead of a 10 can be top of a sequence (1098x) or from an interior sequence (A109x; K109x), or leading from shortness. In “jack denies,” 10 can be from KJ10x or AJ10x, etc.

The lead of a 9 in standard leads is “top of nothing” (or you might have 987x). For people playing the “jack denies” system, the lead of a 9 shows either zero or two higher cards. (Thus, they lead a 9 from 98xx and also from A109x, K109x, Q109x, etc.) **Check your opponent's convention cards!**

To lead **top of a sequence** in no trump, you should have three cards in a row, at the head of the suit (e.g., QJ10x) or with the 3rd card missing only one spot (QJ9x). If the 3rd card is missing more than one spot, lead 4th-best (e.g., from QJ854, lead the 5). If the sequence is in the middle of the suit and is headed by the 9 or lower, ignore the sequence and lead 4th-best (e.g., from Q9873, lead the 7).

If **partner has overcalled, lead partner’s suit** (unless you have a very strong suit of your own and an outside entry).

Leading from a **strong sequence in a 4-card suit** is usually better than leading from a weaker holding in a 5-card suit (e.g., prefer KQJx, KQ10x, QJ10x to Jxxxx or Qxxxx).

Opponents are more likely to conceal a long minor than a long major, so **prefer to lead the major** rather than a minor if you have two 4-card suits of approximately equal strength.

If **dummy has indicated a long, strong suit**, it is often vital to make an attacking lead—even if it means leading a short suit (e.g., KQx; AKx; QJx) rather than a longer one.

Lead of a low card should promise an honor in your suit (and interest in partner returning it). Therefore, if you are going to lead from a 4-card suit that does not have an honor, lead either highest or second-highest. (For example, from (8642, try the 8; from 9742, try the 7). Leading 8 or 7 is usually “top of nothing,” but partner can check with the *Rule of 11* to determine whether it is 4th-best or “top of nothing.”

If you have an extremely weak hand, try to figure out partner's likely suit and lead it. Bear in mind that *if s/he had a chance to overcall at a low level (at the one level) and did not, that suit is probably not your best prospect.*