



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(399) Unusual Honor Leads

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Level: 7 of 10 (3 of 6)

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

There are some situations and times we may agree to make leads that seems strange. These situations are usually chosen because we are trying to solve a particular lead problem with partner or create some complexity for declarer. Here we look at a collection of agreements and situations where we might make what seems like an unusual honor lead.

Interior Sequence Leads

When making an opening lead from a sequence of the three consecutive honors, we lead the top of the sequence. But when we lead from a collection of honors that are broken with one high honor, a break, and then a sequence of honors, the *standard* lead from this holding is the top of the interior sequence.

Standard Leads from Interior Sequences

<i>Suits</i>	<i>Notrump</i>
KJT _x +	AJT _x +, KJT _x +
KT9 _x +, QT9 _x +	AT9 _x +, KT9 _x +, QT9 _x +

When we lead a Jack or a Ten, it can be difficult for partner to recognize that we are leading from one of these holdings, rather than from the “top of a sequence”.

Example 1

When we lead a Jack, partner may not be able to tell if we have led from JT_x or KJT_x. They may want to win the opening lead if we do not have the King and may want to hold up if we have the second holding.

These opening leads of “top of an interior sequence” produce ambiguity about the layout of the honor cards at trick one, and this ambiguity may cause a problem by giving partner a difficult decision (as in Example 1). But this ambiguity can work to our advantage in giving declarer a difficult decision about the location of the cards at trick one.

Let’s look at an alternative approach to opening leads from these holdings.



Jack Denies, Coded 10s and 9s (0 or 2 Higher)

Some partnerships find this ambiguity too difficult to deal with at trick 1 on defense. To get rid of this ambiguity, they change their opening lead agreements from these broken honor sequence holdings so that they never lead a Jack from the top of an interior sequence. That means that an opening lead of a Jack denies any higher honors in that suit – “Jack Denies”.

With these new agreements, partnerships need to have different lead agreements when they do lead from an interior sequence. These partnerships lead the second highest from that sequence (instead of the top of the interior sequence). This is the “Coded 10s and 9s”, meaning that the lead of a Ten or Nine shows 0 or 2 honors higher when these are led.

Example of Jack Denies, Coded 10s and 9s

Suits	Notrump
KJT _x +	AJT _x +, KJT _x +
KT ₉ _x +, QT ₉ _x +	AT ₉ _x +, KT ₉ _x +, QT ₉ _x +

We can see that when a Ten or Nine is led, it does not have one card higher than it. It either is the top of our holding or has two cards higher than it (including the card immediately above it). This can help partner determine the layout of the cards around the table.

Example 2 – Coded 10s and 9s to Help Partner

	Qxx
T	Axx
	???

In this situation, using coded 10s helps East know that either West led from KJT+ or that declarer has the KJ+. In either case, East can play low (assuming declarer does not play the Queen from the dummy) and will discover the situation. East does not have to worry about declarer having a singleton King, because that is not a possible holding when partner leads the Ten.

Problems with Jack Denies, Coded 10s and 9s (0 or 2 Higher)

By clarifying the position of the cards at trick 1, “Coded 10s and 9s” and “Jack Denies” may also help declarer know the location of the missing or ambiguous honor.

Example 3 - Jack Denies Helps the Declarer

	AQxx
JTxxx	Kx
	xx

In this position, on the lead of the Jack (playing Jack Denies), declarer knows that the King is “offside” and the finesse cannot work. Declarer plays the Ace and then low, setting up the Queen for a discard.



Example 4 – Jack Denies Helps the Declarer

```

      AQxx
JTxxxx      K
      xx
    
```

Sometimes when declarer plays the Ace, it helps them simply drop the singleton King.

Because of these types of positions, most expert players do not play “Jack Denies” and “Coded 10s and 9s”. The help it provides to partner is not as valuable as the help that it provides to declarer.

“Jack Denies” and “Coded 10s and 9s” in the Middle of the Hand

Some expert players do use Jack Denies and Coded 10s and 9s in the middle of the defense. By using these agreements in the middle of the hand, a defender can use the shift of a Jack, Ten, or Nine to clarify the position of the suit. This can help partner know what to do.

Examples – Coded 10s in the Middle of the Hand

Example 5

```

      Qxx
KJT      Axxx
      xxx
    
```

Example 6

```

      Qxx
Axxx      KJT
      xxx
    
```

In Example 5, if East makes a discard saying they like this suit, West knows partner has the Ace. West can lead the Ten and allow East to work out the position of the honors. A similar play can be made by East in Example 6 (shifting to the Ten) if West makes a signal showing the Ace of this suit.

A Particularly Difficult Holding - Opening Lead from AQTxx

When on opening lead against a notrump contract it is difficult when you have a holding like AQTxx. Here we have 3 honors, so it seems that we should lead high. But we do not have touching honors to lead from. Based on the layout of the suit around the table, the winning card to lead can be a variety of different ones from this awkward holding. The best opening lead will usually be either the Ace, the Queen, or even 4th best. Let’s look at some examples of the way the suit may lay around the table and see what the best lead is in each of these situations.

Example 7

```

      K
AQTxx      Jxx
      xxxx
    
```

This is an example of a layout where the Ace is the winning opening lead.



There are many other holdings where leading the Queen is the best opening lead.

Example 8

J
AQTxx 9xx
 Kxxx

Here the Queen is the best lead, if we are going to lead the suit.

Example 9

 Kxx
AQTxx xxx
 Jx

From this holding the Queen is the best opening lead. A lead of the Ace allows declarer to hold up and cut communication, and the lead of 4th best allows declarer to have two stoppers.

Example 10

 Jxx
AQTxx Kx
 xxx

From this holding the lead of 4th best turns out to be the best opening lead.

Standard Lead from AQTxx

As you can see from the examples, there are holdings where each card (Ace, Queen, or 4th best) is the winning lead. But the general consensus for the best opening lead from this holding (given no information from the auction) is the Queen.

AQTxx

The lead of the Queen is a nice balance between forcing out a higher honor (not leading too low) and still remaining in control of a suit (keeping the Ace and not letting the declarer make a hold up play to cut communication between us and partner.)



Rusinow

Another unusual honor lead method is Rusinow opening leads. These are leads where players agree to lead the second highest of touching honors, not the highest. Players that use these opening lead methods make the following leads:

- AKxx
- KQxx
- QJxx
- T9xx
- AQJx (Notrump only)
- AJTx (Notrump only)
- AT9x (Notrump only)
- KJTx
- QT9x
- AKQx
- KQJx
- QJTx

If the opponents are playing these methods we need to know, so we can properly place honors. Be sure to find out the opponents' honor lead methods.

Note: To make matters even more complex, some partnerships choose to play Rusinow opening leads from 4+card suits and "standard honor leads" from shorter suits.

Conclusion

The point of this lesson was to introduce some situations where our leads may be difficult. We can use some special agreements (coded 10s and 9s) to try to clarify when we are leading from interior sequences, we can play Rusinow opening leads in an effort to better handle honor holdings, and we have to determine what to lead from some complex holdings like AQTxx. Some of what we are working on here involves changing our agreements, but others involve judging the best card to lead from awkward honor holdings. Make sure that you and partner put some work into your judgement and your agreements from these multiple honor holding situations.