



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(453) Leads - Visualizing Suits

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

One of the major skills needed as a defender is the ability to visualize the layout or possible layouts of a particular suit around the table. This needs to be done when partner makes an opening lead and we are 3rd hand, but it also needs to be done in other suits during the defense. That means when partner (or we) breaks a new suit in the middle of the defense then we want to try to visualize the possible layouts around the table.

Middle of the Hand Agreements

Just as with our opening leads, we need to have agreements about how we lead new suits in the middle of the hand. Most players play attitude-oriented shifts (high from nothing, low from an honor) and we can still play 4th best from interest (like Hxxxx) if we think count matters as well. (Some players do play 3rd/5th in the middle of the hand, though this is not as common.) It is a good discussion to have with partner as to the meaning of our cards when breaking a new suit in the middle of the hand. Some useful questions are:

- What do we play from xxx?
 - Suggested Agreement – it depends on the situation.
- What do we play from xxxx?
 - Suggested Agreement – top or second best.
- What do we play from xxxxx?
 - Suggested Agreement – top, second, or 4th best depending on the situation.
- What do we play from Hxxx?
 - Suggested Agreement – 4th best.
- What do we play from Hxxxx?
 - Suggested Agreement – 4th best.



Interpreting Leads

Once we have agreements with partner about how we attack new suits (what we lead from many different holdings), then we need to make use of the information available to us. We need to think about the inferences that are available to us from what partner did and what partner did not do. We have a lot to consider:

- The Contract (NT vs. Suits)
 - In a suit contract, partner will not underlead an Ace or touching honors on opening lead.
 - In a NT contract, partner could underlead either of these holdings on opening lead.
- Opening Lead vs. Middle of the Hand (we have different agreements for each)
 - In the middle of the hand, partner can (or we can) underlead Aces (if it seems right) and we can underlead touching honors (if it seems right) – though both can be dangerous.
- Low Card vs. High Card (Attitude vs. Count Oriented)
 - Most of our middle of the hand actions are attitude-oriented, although if shifting to partner's bid suit, we might have some special agreements.
- What suit did partner *not* lead? (Why didn't partner lead the expected suit?)
 - Can we infer something about partner's holding because they didn't lead the suit that seemed called for – unbid suit, our suit, etc.? This could be because they have the Ace empty in the suit or they have chosen to lead another suit because of their excellent holding.

Conclusion

Understanding the possible layouts of a suit around the table requires us to combine the above information and considerations with “educated guesses” about the layout of the suit and hand. Using your head as a “random generator” you should be able to guess a few possible positions of the cards around the table. (Example – partner has Qxx or Kxxx). This is a skill you need to practice and work to develop to learn to make this information useful to you when defending a hand!