



Adventures in Bridge

Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education

www.advinbridge.com

This Week in Bridge

(348) Opening Leads vs. 4-Major Contracts

© AiB

Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When we make an opening lead against a game contract, then the opponents likely did a lot of bidding along the way to the final contract. This gives us valuable information that we should use to help us making a better opening lead. This information can help us choose between active vs. passive (which honors, if any, to lead away from), which suits to consider leading, or even help us know when to lead trump. Let's take a look at how we make use of the auction to help us make good opening leads.

An Invited Game and Acceptance

When the opponents get to game through an invitational (and acceptance) auction, the opponents do not have a significant amount of extra values. That means that we want to be careful to not make the play easier for declarer. That suggests a passive lead in auctions like this:

Example 1

1♣ 1♥
2♥ 3♥
4♥

This auction suggests that the opponents barely have enough values to reach game.

Example 2

1NT 2♣
2♠ 3♠
4♠

When we are on lead against this auction, we want to be particularly safe (passive), because the opponents have limited values and we are leading into an extremely strong hand.

Common leads in auctions like this are top of nothing or sequences of honors.



Help Suit Game Try

When the declarer asks for help in a side suit and the Responder bids game (accepting the invite) then this means that Responder either has shortness (ruffing values) or honors in that suit (“traditional” help).

Example 3

1♥ 2♥
3♦ 4♥

If we have a poor holding in this ♦ suit, then it is likely that the dummy’s help is based on fitting honors. In that case we should attack one of the other suits in case our tricks can go away. If we have a good holding in the suit where declarer asked for help, then we expect that the dummy accept the help suit game try based on shortness (ruffing values). Our way of attacking the dummy’s ruffing values is to lead trump. So, to protect our honors in this side suit from being ruffed away, we lead trump. Notice that if the dummy accepts the declarer’s game try, then it is rarely right to lead the suit where they asked for help.

Strong Dummy

When the declarer has a weak hand (like when they preempt the bidding) and the opponents reach game, then the dummy is likely to be strong. When we are leading into the weak hand we tend to attack (lead away from our honors), but when we know that the dummy is strong, then we have an incentive to lead through strength. Leading a sequence often “pins” an honor in the dummy, but even if we do not have a sequence, leading away from an honor can allow our side take or develop tricks. We may find that we need to lead through the dummy’s holding in a particular suit multiple times, so it can be important that we get off the best opening lead the first time.

Example 4

 Kxx
Qxx AJTx
 xxx

Here partner can win the opening lead and then attempt to “get us back in” using another suit, so that we can lead this suit again, taking 3 tricks for our side.



Conclusion

The opening lead that we choose against a Major suit game contract should be dramatically affected by the auction the opponents used to get there. It is important for you to listen to the auction and be able to understand what it suggests is best for you to do. You will not always get the best opening lead, but if you can predict how the play is likely to proceed you will be a much better defender and opening leader!