

NO TRUMP DEFENSE by Maritha Pottenger

Opening Leads

- 1) Fourth-best from your longest and strongest suit is traditional and often best. You may not want to lead your longest suit if it has been bid by Declarer or Dummy.
- 2) A top of nothing lead will often work out when all the strength is in one hand (e.g., 2NT-P-P-P) or when your suit(s) have been bid by Declarer or Dummy. Mandatory against 6NT (if no sequence to lead).
- 3) When given a choice between leading a 4-card minor or a 4-card major, prefer the major if neither Stayman nor Jacoby was used. Dummy, at least, probably does not have a 4-card major.
- 4) If your partner bids a suit, lead it! Make traditional leads (top of two; low from three or four to an honor). I prefer low from ANY 3 cards also because partner knows you are UNLIKELY to hold an honor.
- 5) It is usually better to lead a strong sequence in a four card suit (such as QJ10x, KQJx, or KQ10x) than a weaker holding in a 5-card suit (Qxxxx or Jxxxx).
- 6) If you have a very weak hand (e.g., 0 entries), try to find partner's suit to lead.
- 7) If Dummy has indicated a long, strong suit, you need to make an attacking lead. Leading a strong short suit (AKx; KQx, QJx may be preferable to a longer, weaker suit.)
- 8) Leading from AQ10x or AJ10x or AK10x or AQJx often gives up a trick. You may prefer to try a "top of nothing" lead, and wait for partner to lead through Declarer to your strength. If, however, you have **five** cards in such a suit, it is worth leading. It is OK to give up one trick and get four in return!

Middle of the Hand

No trump is usually a race between defenders and Declarer to set up long-suit winners. If you (or your partner) have led your long suit, it is usually best to keep on pushing that long suit. It is rarely correct to switch. In order to help partner set up a long suit, you should try to gain the lead as soon as possible to continue leading partner's suit before his/her entries are used up. Be willing to play second-hand high if it will help you get the lead and save an entry for partner AFTER his/her suit is set up.

You may have to switch suits if:

- 1) It is clear that partner's lead is "top of nothing" so you need to look elsewhere for tricks.
- 2) It is clear that Declarer has too many tricks if you continue that suit, so you need to look for an alternate suit that offers a chance of setting the hand.
- 3) Dummy has a threatening long suit, but you have a chance to "kill" an entry to dummy. Killing dummy (so Declarer cannot get back to the long suit) is a top priority for defenders.
- 4) Switching suits will mess up Declarer's transportation or "lock" Declarer in one hand (Declarer's hand or Dummy) at which point Declarer must lose some tricks.

Remember to play lowest of touching honors when your partner or Declarer leads to you. Play top of a sequence when you are leading a suit. If you lead a low card, it promises an honor in that suit.

Giving partner count is important in three situations:

- 1) When partner leads an Ace (asking you to unblock by dropping your highest honor) and you have no honor to unblock, give count in that suit.
- 2) When partner leads a suit and dummy wins the trick with the queen or a lower card. Give count.
- 3) When Declarer is trying to set up a long suit (usually in Dummy), give count (in case partner has Ace so partner knows how long to hold up with that Ace).

End of the Hand

If you have to do some discarding, consider partner's problems as well as your own. You two should be signaling each other so that you can "divide up the duties" if there are two suits to be guarded. If you have set up a long suit, but are unlikely to ever get in again, do not be afraid to discard those winners if no one else has any of that suit. **It is better to discard a winner when you KNOW you cannot get in rather than discarding a "worthless" card in another suit which tells Declarer to finesse your partner rather than you.**