

Notes from *The Complete Book of Opening Leads* by Easley Blackwood

Blackwood suggests deciding what suit to lead first (based on bidding), and then look at your hand and decide which card to lead.

If you feel a short-suit lead is needed against no trump: Ace from AQx

From Kxx when partner has bid suit: If LHO has indicated strength in that suit, lead the King. If RHO has indicated strength in the suit, lead low. If you have NOTHING ELSE IN THE HAND, lead the King to look at dummy and hope partner can indicate best shift. If partner has not bid suit, but you believe (from the auction) leading that suit is essential to set up tricks, lead low.

From Qxx, almost always lead low. If you believe LHO has strength and partner also, lead the queen to finesse honors in dummy. Underleading a queen in an unbid suit is more dangerous than underleading a King in an unbid suit. (Often get a trick back with latter; may not with former.) Blackwood recommends only underleading a queen in an unbid suit when bidding makes it crystal clear that that suit should be led.

From Jxx, lead small. Exception: when you know all the strength in that suit is in dummy and partner has strength in the suit, lead the Jack to finesse honors in dummy.

Leading top of nothing in a side suit rarely sacrifices a trick. High from three trumps might sacrifice a trick (due to possibility of over-ruffing). So, lead low from 3 trumps.

From AQ109xx against NT, Blackwood recommends leading the Ace when you have one likely outside entry (picks up singleton Kings and Jack doubleton in dummy) or the 10 when you have no outside entry.

Blackwood suggests leading second-highest from 4 small cards in suit contracts. However, he recommends 4th-best from 4 small if you believe partner has length in suit (to give count).

If one leads 3rd and 5th best, low from 3 small would replace “top of nothing.”

Circumstances under which you can consider leading a singleton:

- 1) You have an otherwise worthless trump (e.g., Kxx NOT QJ10). The small spot card is otherwise useless
- 2) You control the trump suit (e.g., Axx or Kxx behind opener).
- 3) You think that if you take the 1st or 2nd round of trumps, you will be able to give partner the lead. (If you have 8 HCP or fewer, good chance partner will have 8 HCP. Probability that 8 HCP will include an Ace is 62.%. Probability of 10 HCP having Ace is 79.9%. Probability of 12 HCP include an Ace is 90.2%.)

It is reasonable to go for singleton lead when singleton is an Ace & you have 5 or fewer HCP.

Lead long suits against no trump, to develop tricks through length. Odds of getting a length trick out of 4th card in 4-card suit is 42.45%. A 5-card suit is worth 1.5 long-card tricks. Blackwood believes that leading from a weak 5-card suit is better even than leading from a sequence of QJ9x or J1098.

Forcing game (making Declarer trump in the long-trump hand) likely to be successful when:

- 1) One defender has 4 or more trumps.
- 2) The defenders have an established suit, or one that can be quickly established.
- 3) Declarer has long trumps in one hand (where you are forcing him/her) & short trumps in other hand.
- 4) Defenders have stoppers in the suits that Declarer needs to establish.

If defenders also have a stopper in the trump suit, they can hold off taking that stopper until the short-trump hand is exhausted of trumps, continuing to force the long trump hand. Occasionally, you can force Declarer to give you a trump trick even when Declarer is playing a 4-4 fit. (You force both Declarer and Dummy to ruff themselves down to 3 cards & your 4th trump—or partner's 4th trump—will take a trick.

When You Should Lead Trumps

- 1) To keep Declarer from cross-ruffing (including when opponents sacrifice)
- 2) To stop Declarer from ruffing in short-trump hand (usually Dummy).
- 3) To make a “safe,” passive lead (not giving Declarer anything by breaking new suits).
- 4) To get two trumps for one
- 5) When partner passes your low level take-out double.
- 6) When Declarer has shown a 3-suited hand, a trump lead is almost always right.

Leading from Tenace Combinations

Dangerous, but may be necessary when bidding suggests that, unless you establish your winners right away, Declarer will be able to discard losers on a long suit. Leading or underleading a queen or king without other honors is also an attacking lead. Leading an Ace without the King is an attacking lead if you think from bidding you may be able to give partner a ruff. If you just feel that other leads would be worse, leading the Ace could be considered passive. The weaker your hand, the better an attacking lead is (partner is likely to have something). World champions who led King from King doubleton generally had 7 or fewer HCP (so partner likely to hold something) and no more than two honor cards.

Opening Leads that Blackwood Considers Dangerous (likely to give away tricks):

- 1) Lead of an Ace (without King) in an unbid suit.
- 2) Blind lead of a short suit (singleton or doubleton)
- 3) Lead of the suit Dummy has bid
- 4) Lead of a doubleton queen or jack in an unbid suit.
- 5) Lead of a suit (not trumps) bid on your right.

Opening Leads Against Slams

- 1) Passive against any NT slams and all grand slams
- 2) Active leads best against small slams in suits (willing to underlead kings & queens)

- 3) Sometimes good to cash Ace (without King) or trick may go away. Blackwood says more slams are made because Ace was NOT led than because Ace was led. Avoid leading Ace if you feel another trick must be established first; opponents have bid the suit in which you have an Ace; opponents have shown balanced hands (no threat of long suits to develop).

Experts tended to choose attacking leads when they had between 3 and 6 HCP. They tended to be passive with 9-11 HCP. Attacking leads in short suits are more likely to succeed than attacking in a long suit.

Opening Lead of an Ace (without King) also recommended against Gambling 3NT and often works against 4 level preempts (lets you look at dummy and decide on best shift).