

DEFENDER PLAY - SPRING 2019 - WEEK 5  
DEFENSE AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

LAST REVISED ON APRIL 15, 2019  
COPYRIGHT © 2013-2019 BY DAVID L. MARCH

WHAT A DIFFERENCE TRUMP MAKES!

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen, a long suit is often an advantage to both the declarer and the defenders when playing a no trump contract. This is not usually true in a suit contract because trump can often be used to defeat the advantage of a long suit. On the other hand, a short suit can be an advantage to the defenders if they are able to *ruff* (trump) tricks in the short suit before declarer draws all of their trump.

DECLARER STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

After your partnership makes the opening lead and the dummy is tabled, an effective declarer will pause and count the losers in the hand with the longest trump suit (usually declarer's hand). The loser count will include losses that are required to promote high cards in a sequence or develop a long suit. Then declarer will analyze ways to use the cards in the short trump hand (usually the dummy) to eliminate any extra losers.

There are three tactics that declarer can use to eliminate the losers in the long trump hand:

- ✓ Ruff losers using trump in the dummy.
- ✓ Discard losers on extra winners in the dummy.
- ✓ Finesse your partnership's high cards.

Unless the trump in the dummy is needed to ruff losers, one of the first things the declarer will do is draw all your partnership's trump so that you can not interfere with declarer's plan.

DEFENDER STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

If your partnership has a long suit, either the declarer or the dummy will be short in that suit. Because of the power of declarer's trump, developing a long suit is not a good defensive strategy. Instead, your partnership should use some combination of the following strategies and tactics:

- ✓ Take winners in your long suit(s) early to prevent declarer from discarding losers in the suit on extra winners in some other suit.
- ✓ Play your short suit(s) early to allow your partnership to ruff one or more tricks before declarer draws all of your trump.
- ✓ Lead trump to reduce declarer's ruffing power against your long suit(s).

## OPENING LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

Auctions that arrive at a suit contract usually convey more information about the location of high cards and the shape of hands than auctions that arrive at a no trump contract. An analysis of the bidding will help you to decide which of the following guidelines is most appropriate for a specific hand.

Your first choice for a lead suit should be your partner's suit.

If your partner opened the bidding, made an overcall, or made a lead directing double, your lead should help your partnership take tricks in partner's suit.

You will usually be short in your partner's suit. With two or more cards in the suit lead:

- ✓ An Ace if you have it: **A** 7 5; **A** J T 6
- ✓ Top of a doubleton: **9** 6; **K** 7; **J** 2
- ✓ Top of touching honors: **Q** J 5; **T** 9 3; **J** T 7
- ✓ Low from three or four to an honor: **Q** 7 **4**; **K** 9 4 **3**; **J** 5 4 **2**
- ✓ Three or four without an honor:
  - Lead high if you did raise partner's four or five card suit:  
**9** 7 **4**; **6** 3 **2**; **9** 8 4 **3**; **7** 5 4 **2**
  - Lead low if you did not raise partner's suit:  
**9** 7 **4**; **6** 3 **2**; **9** 8 4 **3**; **7** 5 4 **2**

*If you raised partner's suit, your partner already knows you had at least three cards in the suit and will not assume a high spot card lead was from the top of a doubleton.*

### EXCEPTION

- If you have a singleton **A** or a doubleton **AK** in another suit, take your winners before leading to your partner. Your partner should realize you had a good reason for not leading your partner's suit and will return your suit for a possible ruff.

*With an **AK** doubleton, lead the King followed by the Ace. This violation of the normal "lead top of connecting honors" tells your partner that your **KA** was a doubleton.*

Your second choice should be an attacking lead.

An attacking lead is a lead from a suit with a strong sequence. You want to be sure that you can take your winners in a suit before declarer discards any losers in the suit. Unlike sequence leads in no trump, it is not necessary to have three cards in a leading sequence but you should have three cards to lead from an interior sequence.

- ✓ Sure tricks: A K 5; A K Q 7
- ✓ Top of a two or three card leading sequence: K Q J; Q J T 5; K Q 9 6; Q J 7 5
- ✓ Top of a three card or longer interior sequence: K J T 9; Q T 9 8

#### EXCEPTION

- Do not lead from a suit with an Ace followed by an interior sequence. For example do not lead from a suit with AQJT6 or AJT9.

*Do not underlead an Ace in a suit contract!*

**If you have trump**, your third choice should be a lead from a short **unbid** suit.

A lead from a short suit is most effective when the bidding suggests your partner has some strength and can gain the lead and return the suit to give you a chance for a ruff.

- ✓ Top of a spot doubleton: 9 6; 8 4
- ✓ A singleton: A; J; 4;

A singleton lead can also be effective if the suit was bid by the dummy (lead through strength in the dummy toward weakness in declarer's hand).

#### EXCEPTIONS

- Leading the top of **Ax**, **Kx**, **Qx**, or **Jx** is usually dangerous unless partner bid the suit.
- When you are long in the trump suit, leading a singleton is often less effective than attacking a long suit to force declarer to use trump.
- Leading a short suit when you are likely to get your trump tricks anyway is not a good idea. For example, if you are lucky enough to have **QJT9** of trump you will get two trump tricks and only two trump tricks. It is better to try to gain tricks in another suit.

Your fourth choice should be a passive lead from an **unbid** suit.

Do not lead away from an Ace in a suit contract! If you must lead the suit, lead the Ace. The best passive leads are:

- ✓ Fourth highest in a long suit: K T 4 3 2; Q 9 6 5
- ✓ Low from three to an honor: K 7 3; Q 8 5

#### EXCEPTION

- Avoid leading from three small cards. If you must lead from the suit, lead low so your partner does not think your lead was top of a doubleton.

Your last choice should be a trump lead.

A trump lead is very effective if declarer's second suit is the trump suit.

East	South	West	North
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

East	South	West	North
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

In the left hand example, the bidding tells you that dummy is short in hearts and declarer probably has heart losers to ruff in the dummy. In the right hand example, dummy is short in spades and declarer probably has spade losers to ruff in the dummy.

**EXCEPTIONS**

- Leading trump is a bad idea if you have a trump honor and declarer's opening suit is the trump suit.
- Leading trump is a bad idea when opponents are playing a misfit because your partnership probably has the majority of the trump.

*The left hand example is a potential misfit but the odds favor an eight-card or longer diamond fit.*

**OPENING LEAD EXAMPLES**

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 1				
SOUTH - YOU	South	West	North	East
♠ 9 6 2	Pass	1♦	1♠	2♥
♥ 9 3	Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
♦ 6 4 2	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♣ Q J T 9 3				

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 2				
SOUTH - YOU	East	South	West	North
♠ 5	1♠	2♣	2♦	Pass
♥ Q T 7 4	2NT	Pass	4♠	Pass
♦ 7 6 4	Pass	Pass		
♣ A K 8 6 2				

**Example 1:** It might be tempting to lead the ♣Q, the top of a solid sequence. But by the time you establish the clubs, declarer will probably be void and will ruff your winners. Your partner bid spades. Since you do not have an honor or a doubleton, lead low so your partner does not think you led top of a doubleton.

**Example 2:** The ♣A is the obvious lead. Take your club winners before declarer can discard club losers. If you are lucky, your partner will be short in clubs and may be able to ruff a third club lead.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 3					OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 4				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West	SOUTH - YOU	East	South	West	North
♠ K 8 7 6 3	Pass	1♥	Pass	2♥	♠ T 9 8 4	1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
♥ 5 2	Pass	4♥	Pass	Pass	♥ 7 4 3	3♦	Pass	4♥	Pass
♦ <b>K</b> Q J	Pass				♦ <b>8</b>	Pass	Pass		
♣ T 7 2					♣ T 8 6 5 4				
VULNERABLE									

**Example 3:** The obvious lead is the ♦ K, top of connecting honors in an unbid suit. Establish your winners before declarer discards diamond losers.

**Example 4:** Stop to plan a defense. Since you have nothing, your partner probably has at least ten high card points. Even though declarer bid diamonds, your best lead is probably the singleton ♦ 8. You might consider leading the ♠ T, top of connecting honors in the leading sequence in an unbid major suit. Partner might have some strength in spades. But if partner has the ♦ A, partner can take the first diamond trick, lead a diamond to give you a ruff, and then you can lead a spade in the hope that partner can again take the trick and lead another diamond for a second ruff which would set the contract.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 5					OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 6				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West	SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West
♠ A Q J T	Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT	♠ A T 5	Pass	1NT	Pass	2♥
♥ 7 4 <b>2</b>	Pass	2♥	Pass	Pass	♥ 7 6 5 3 2	Pass	2♠	Pass	3♠
♦ Q 7 5	Pass				♦ <b>A</b>	Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass
♣ T 9 8					♣ Q T 9 8	Pass			
					VULNERABLE				

**Example 5:** This is an ideal hand for a trump lead. From the bidding you know that West is short in spades, your best suit. Opponents have also reached a contract in the secondary suit which means that they probably have a 4-4 trump split. A trump lead will reduce their ruffing power and increase your chances of taking several spade tricks. Lead the ♥ 2. You have a three card interior sequence in spades but you should not underlead an Ace against a suit contract.

**Example 6:** Lead the singleton ♦ A followed by the ♣ T, top of the three card interior sequence. Your partner should realize your ♦ A was a singleton and if partner can take a club trick, partner will lead a diamond to give you a ruff.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 7				
SOUTH - YOU	East	South	West	North
♠ A 8 7 5	1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
♥ 7 6	3♥	Pass	4♠	Pass
♦ K J 8 <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">2</span>	Pass	Pass		
♣ J 3 2				

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 8				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West
♠ A T 8	1♦	1♥	2♦	3♥
♥ T 9	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♦ Q 6 5 3				
♣ J T 6 3				
VULNERABLE				

**Example 7:** Since you do not have an attacking sequence, your best lead is the ♦ 2, fourth highest in your longest and strongest unbid suit.

**Example 8:** Because you supported diamonds, partner knows you do not have a doubleton. Lead the ♦ Q, top of partner's opening suit.

## ATTITUDE SIGNALS

Attitude signals that encourage partner in a no trump contract are given when you have high card strength in the suit that partner led. But if you have trump against a suit contract it is sometimes right to give an encouraging signal with a doubleton or a worthless three card suit. If you have a doubleton, your goal is to void yourself in the suit so you can get a ruff before declarer takes your trump.

ATTITUDE SIGNAL • EXAMPLE 1 • ENCOURAGE													
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">♥ <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">A</span></div> <div style="text-align: center;">↘</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">♥ <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">3</span></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">                 PARTNER                  DECLARER      DUMMY                  YOU             </div> <div style="text-align: center;">                 ♠ J T 7 2                  ♥ 8 <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">2</span> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">↙</div> <div style="text-align: center;">                 ♠ Q 5                  ♥ 9 4             </div> <div style="text-align: center;">↘</div> </div>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 12.5%;">West</th> <th style="width: 12.5%;">North</th> <th style="width: 12.5%;">East</th> <th style="width: 12.5%;">South</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1♠</td> <td>2♥</td> <td>3♠</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	West	North	East	South	1♠	2♥	3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass
West	North	East	South										
1♠	2♥	3♠	Pass										
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass										

In this example, your partner led the ♥ A, top of a leading sequence. From the bidding you know partner has at least five hearts and you see two in the dummy and two in your hand. That means declarer has at least three hearts even if partner started with six. Although you have no high card strength in hearts, you should play the ♥ 9 to encourage partner to follow with the ♥ K and a third heart to give you an over ruff with the ♠ Q.

*When you play high-low on the first two tricks in the suit that partner led, you are telling your partner that you have a doubleton in the suit.*

ATTITUDE SIGNAL • EXAMPLE 2 • DISCOURAGE				
♠ 4	♠ A	↘	♠ 6 5	↙
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           PARTNER            DECLARER                  DUMMY            YOU         </div>				
↙	♠ Q 9 2	↘	♥ T 9 4 3	↙
↘	♥ 7 2	↘		↘

  

East	South	West	North
Pass	Pass	1♥	1♠
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

In the second example, you should discourage your partner because:

- You do not have the ♠K and you do not want to give the impression that you do in case partner does not have the King.
- You do not have a doubleton and even if you did, you would not be able to overruff the dummy on the third lead unless declarer made a mistake by playing a low trump.

Note that there is some danger that your signal will discourage your partner from leading the ♠K on the next trick because partner might assume you want a suit switch. Even if partner thinks you want a suit switch, partner should lead the ♠K before making the switch.

## SUBSEQUENT LEADS

Most of the guidelines for opening leads also apply when you are making a lead in the middle of the hand. For example, if you would have led the K from KQ93 at trick one then the correct lead is the K if you are leading at trick four. But Larry Cohen<sup>1</sup> points out several exceptions:

### ✓ Leading Aces

You should lead an Ace at trick one only if:

- it is top of a leading sequence that includes the King or
- it is a singleton.

But later in the hand you might want to lead the Ace to take the setting trick. You might also lead the Ace if the prior play and the cards in the dummy give an indication that your partner has the King.

<sup>1</sup> See *Larry Teaches Opening Leads* by Larry Cohen. Can be ordered from Baron Barkley Bridge Supply ([www.baronbarkley.com](http://www.baronbarkley.com)).

### ✓ Underleading Aces

You should not underlead an Ace at trick one. But you might want to underlead the Ace on a later trick in the hopes that declarer makes a wrong guess about its location:

- Suppose the dummy on your left has the **KJ**. If you underlead the Ace, declarer on the right might assume your partner has the Ace and play the Jack which might give your partner a trick with the Queen.
- Suppose the dummy on your right has all low cards. If you underlead the Ace, declarer on your left holding a **KJ** might guess wrong and play the Jack to give your partner a trick with the Queen.

### ✓ Leading Honor-Spot Doubletons

You should not lead from **Ax**, **Kx**, **Qx**, or **Jx** at trick one. But depending on the prior play and the cards in the dummy, you might want to lead the honor on a later trick.

### ✓ Leading From Three Low Cards

If you must lead from three low cards at trick one, you should lead low. But if you are leading from a suit on a later trick, Larry Cohen recommends BOSTON:

- **Bottom Of Something:** K 7 4; J 9 4 2; Q 6 3
- **Top Of Nothing:** 7 6 4; 9 5 2; 6 4 3