

Leading Partner's Suit

By Warren Watson

Kootenay Jewel Bridge Club

Last Revised June 27, 2022

<http://watsongallery.ca/bridge/aaDefense/LeadingPartnersSuit.pdf>

All you need to read:

When partner bids a suit or doubles an artificial (or alerted) bid for a lead, the lead is smallest from three and fourth best from four or more. However, the top card is always led from a doubleton and when the top two cards are touching honours in any holding.

It is not the correct play to always lead the highest in partner's suit except for the cases mentioned below.

Is partner's bid lead directive?

- If partner's opens a 1♣ and never repeats it, it could be xxx and this is not lead-directive
- If partner opens 1♦, this is mildly lead-directive as it could also be xxx but with much less frequency than 1♣
- A major opening is often lead-directive
- A light opening or a one-level overcall is very lead-directive
- An overcall at the two level especially when vulnerable is extremely lead directive.
- A suit (non-jump) in response to partner's takeout double is NOT lead-directive. The doubler is the one who bid the suit., He bid all three unbid suits.

If you have not supported partner's suit

- Count is important
- High from any doubleton: xx, Hx
- Low (4th best) from any suit three or longer: xxx, Hxx, xxxx, Hxxx, xxxxx, Hxxxx, etc
 - Except Axx or Axxx, Lead the Ace if you must lead partner's suit (see below)
- Except when the top two honour cards are touching
 - QJx, QJxx, 109x, 109xx, 109xxx, 98x, 98xx, 98xxx
- When you have three small cards and have not supported partner, it is actually a debate. Some lead MUD just from three rag (xxx) unsupported and the smallest card to show an honour or a stiff. I prefer the smallest.
- Sometimes with Kxx, Kxxx or Qxx, Qxxx of partner's suit etc and no entries, you may lead the highest in partner's suit so you can retain the lead, look at dummy and make a switch to help take partner off of end play.

You have supported partner's suit

- Top of a doubleton as always.
- Top of nothing. (I like the box at the beginning of this document.)
- Little from an honour except the Ace.
- If you have four or more rag (xxxx or xxxxx) and count is important lead 4th best. If it is important to show no honours then lead top of nothing or 2nd top of nothing.

When Holding the Ace of Partner's Suit

Mike Lawrence is a favourite author of mine and he says that a sign of an excellent bridge player is one that with Axx in partner's bid suit will lead another suit keeping the ace to capture something in declarer's hand.

Are opening leads the same as leads later in the play?

Absolutely Not!!

Leads at trick two and later are different because:

- You have seen the dummy
- You have seen the suit declarer attacked first.
- You have seen cards played so far
- You have a count of the hand

Axx or Axxx may often be right later in the play.

Holding a Natural Lead:

When holding a natural lead in a side suit, it is often a better lead than partner's suit. However, if it will disturb partner harmony by not leading his suit, it may be better to just lead his suit.

A natural lead is:

- three (not two) touching honours
 - KQJx (this is always the better lead),
 - QJ10x (this could be the better lead)
- Ace from AK at a suit contract
 - You can play the ace, get partner's signal, look at dummy and then decide whether to continue with the king or switch to partner's suit.

Avoid Suits in which the Opponents have shortness and are playing in their trump fit:

- Is there a future for tricks in partner's suit against opponent's trump contract?
- When holding five card support for partner's suit, it is usually best to attack a side suit.
- Could be the same for xxxx.
- Leading a suit that dummy or declarer has shortness (a singleton or void) can be dangerous as it could set up a discard for declarer.

When really weak and partner has bid.

- **Against a Trump contract:**
 - Let your partner know where you have strength (not a suit bid by declarer or dummy) if you have strength in only one suit.
 - If dummy is marked with a high card in partner's suit, it may always be better to lead partner's suit
 - **Example:**
You are leading against 4♠ and partner opened 1♥.
You have ♠:xx ♥:xxxxx ♦:Qxxx ♣:xx
Lead the 4th best ♦ only if opponents have not bid or implied diamonds.
- **Against 3NT**
 - Even when you have a singleton in partner's suit, it is often best to give partner a head start setting up his suit by leading it on the opening lead.
 - If one is weak, one should almost always lead partner's suit.

Partner has shown Two Suits:

- **Against a trump contract:**
 - Lead the suit in which you have the shorter holding.
 - Lead the suit in which you do not have an Ace (Axx, Axxx).
 - Why free up an honour in declarer's hand just because partner bid the suit!
 - Ace doubleton, lead the Ace if a ruff will not cost you a natural trump trick.
- **Against a Notrump contract**
 - Lead the suit in which you have a stronger and longer holding.

Remember:

Opening Leads one tries never to make:

- Underleading an ace against a trump contract unless leading trump then small from the Ace is best.
- Do not lead a stiff trump
- Do not lead a trump when holding Qxx of trump.
 - Typically leads from honours just sufficiently supported are not good (Jxxx, Qxx, Kx)
- With four or more trump, try to make declarer ruff in the long trump hand.
 - When you shorten his long trump to less than your trump length you gain a trick with a small trump.