

LEADING AGAINST NO TRUMPS



In 1665 the people of the village of Eyam in Derbyshire self-quarantined themselves, not to keep the Plague out, but to keep the Plague from spreading outside the village. As a result 260 out of the 350 villagers died. Those that survived had some natural immunity which they bequeathed to their descendants. I was born exactly 20 miles away from Eyam, which is nothing as the rat runs. Ninety villagers lived to breed and I like to think that I am descended from those villagers or at the least from people who were not infected because of their self-sacrifice. Whatever, I am here to plague you again with another of my bridge articles.

What should you lead against a no-trump contract?

The trouble is, that when you are taught bridge, you are taught the bare minimum and then thrown into the deep end (sounds like quite a pool party!) You don't really work out all the implications of what you were taught and you certainly don't challenge it. You thought that what your bridge teacher gave you was gospel, when in reality it was not the whole truth and sometimes regrettably not the truth at all.

What were you taught to lead against a no-trump contract. I would hazard a guess that you were told the lead the fourth from the top card of your longest and strongest suit. I cringe and I shudder. To me that is the equivalent of saying you will avoid the plague if you carry a pomade of lavender and Earl Grey tea.

Here are some reasons why 4th leads are not necessarily a good thing.

REASON 1: Your suit could well be unestablishable (you are advocating disestablishmentarianism.)

You have this hand: ♠92 ♥Q98 ♦T7 ♣QT9865

Your lead of the C8 won't get you anywhere because a) people generally play in no-trumps because they have failed to find a major fit. This means that they generally have a good holding in the minors and all your lead will achieve, is to give them a cheap finesse to their Jack; b) your partner might have KJ in clubs or even AJ, but the balance of probabilities is that he will have just two clubs whatever they are, so either he will block your suit or declarer will do so by the simple expedient of holding up his Ace for one round; You have only 4 HCP so, if

the opposition have their 25, then your partner will have 11. If he has a 5+ card suit then he will have the much better chance of establishing it and getting in again to enjoy it. Why don't you try and find his suit?

REASON 2: It is never wise to lead from a 4 card suit headed by only one honour.

This is your hand: ♠KQ6 ♥K842 ♦J632 ♣T5

That heart suit does not look very promising, but if you don't lead it, at least you have the chance to make your King. I suppose leading a small heart is better than leading a small diamond, but only marginally. Apart from the fact that leading away from a single honour in a 4 card suit is generally not recommended, get out of the habit of only thinking of your hand when you are choosing a lead. You have a partner! If you are short in a major, he is probably long in it. On this hand I think I would prefer the KS lead. Ironically I would be happier leading the KS if this were my hand: ♠K6 ♥K842 ♦J632 ♣T95.

REASON 3: Don't lead to advertise the distribution of the suit.

This is your hand: ♠J98 ♥QJT ♦KJ97 ♣Q63

Apart from the fact that you would be leading a minor, and apart from the fact that you have a perfectly acceptable alternative lead in the QH, if you lead the 7D you will alert declarer to the lie of the suit. Imagine him taking the first diamond with the 8, stripping the spades and clubs, cashing the AK of hearts and throwing you in with the TH!

REASON 4: The Rule of 11 aids declarer more than the defence.

I am now going to quote unashamedly from Larry Cohen with bold type being my emphasis:

"The Rule of 11 is used for **declarer play** at trick one. It assumes that the opening lead was "4th-best." By subtracting from 11, **the declarer can tell** how many cards higher than the card led are in the other three hands. For example West leads the 5H and in his own hand declarer has J97 and in dummy he has A643. He subtracts 5 from 11 to arrive at 6. So there are 6 cards higher than the 5 in the three other hands. **Declarer** can see 5 of those 6 cards (the A,J,9,7,6). So he knows that East has only one card higher than the 5. He can then also use bridge logic. He can assume that with ?KQ10, West would have led the King. So, probably East's one card above the 5 is the King, Queen, or 10. Declarer will probably play the 9 (or 7) from dummy, in the hopes that East's high card is the

king or queen (twice as likely as the ten). The Rule of 11 is reliable and easy to remember. **Frankly, though, it doesn't come up very often.”**

Now, why would you make a lead that aids the declarer more often than it aids your partner?

REASON 5: The lead of 4th highest from your longest and strongest is not compatible with a superior system of leads which I shall explain soon, because no signal can carry two meanings. 4th leads give COUNT. If the card led is also markedly low it could carry a bit of ATTITUDE saying you like that suit, but this is implied anyway by the fact that you led it. You can only lead from the cards you have been dealt, so an 8 from AQT8 shows no more attitude than an 8 from AQT853. The 8 doesn't show you like the suit somewhat or a great deal.

Sometimes 4th leads work perfectly well. If this were your suit AJT652, the lead of the 6 would work fine, but the lead of the 2 would work equally well if not better. If you happen to play against a really top notch player and your partner leads a low card, he will ask, “What system of leads do you make”. If you reply, “Fourth highest from longest and strongest”, he will nod happily, do the maths and proceed to play the suit perfectly. If however you say, “Reverse attitude. A low card shows interest in the suit,” he will be much less pleased.

So, what system should I be playing that is better? Here it is, but remember, it is my recommendation only. You do not have to play it. If you do play it then your partner must as well.

THE REVERSE ATTITUDE LEAD AGAINST NO-TRUMPS.

Normal attitude is playing high to encourage and low to discourage. Reverse attitude therefore is playing high to discourage and low to encourage.

Reverse attitude leads mean that if you lead a low card, it means that this is the suit you are interested in and wish partner to return should he get in. If you lead a highish spot card, this says that you are not interested in that suit and partner is required to look elsewhere.

These leads do NOT give count. If you are interested in the suit, lead your lowest card. If you wish partner to look elsewhere lead your highest card. Don't send a boy to do a man's job.

These leads do NOT give suit preference. If your partner leads the 9H. It says look elsewhere, but that elsewhere is not necessarily spades. That being said, the other major is often worth a look because no-trumpers tend to hold minors

rather than majors. The best guide to where elsewhere is, is the shape of dummy.

Here are a few hands:

1. ♠962 ♥KJ862 ♦K7 ♣QT9
2. ♠92 ♥AQ78 ♦T87 ♣QT92
3. ♠974 ♥AQ7 ♦Q632 ♣Q86

With Hand 1) I think I am going to lead the 2H. I have a 5 card major which I want to get going as quickly as possible. If we do set the heart suit up, I have cards which might give me a re-entry to enjoy the heart suit. Because I have 3 spades, it is unlikely that partner will have 5 of them and because I have most of the defence's points, he won't be able to get back in again. My 2H is a Reverse Attitude lead. It says, "I really like this suit partner. Put up any high card you have in the suit. Try not to block me and if you ever get in, return this suit."

With Hand 2) I am definitely going to lead the 9S. I do not want to lead away from my tenace in hearts. If partner gets in, I hope he can work out from dummy that I want a heart back. My having only 2 spades is good, because it suggests partner has long spades and he might love my lead. My 9S is a Reverse Attitude lead. It says, "I don't have any interest myself in this suit partner, so when you are on lead, have a look at dummy and try to work out which suit I might be interested in. Give due consideration to the other major."

With Hand 3) the 9S is the stand-out lead. I have no particular suit to establish, but I am certainly not going to lead away from my AQ of hearts and as for the minors, declarer can find his own queens without my help. . My 9S is a Reverse Attitude lead. It says, "I don't have any interest myself in this suit partner, so when you are on lead, have a look at dummy and try to work out which suit I might be interested in." Because I am short in hearts, this suit might not be a stand out choice for partner, but if he leads it, it could be that he has hearts and declarer could have a doubleton King. Wouldn't that be nice?

The Advantages of Reverse Attitude Leads.

- They do not concede unnecessary tricks.
- They do not help declarer count the suit.
- They give information about two suits, the one you lead and the one you are potentially interested in.

- Some declarers assume wrongly that you are interested in the suit you lead even though it is a highish spot card.
- Sometimes your lead coincidentally helps partner with his suit.
- You don't waste unnecessary mental energy withy the rule of 11.
- They avoid misleading your partner when you don't have a suit of your own you are interested in.
- They incline you towards leading partner's suit rather than your own.

There is no conflict between Reverse Attitude leads and Sequence leads. Sequence leads are often the very best leads against no-trumps, but because they always involve leading an honour, there is no conflict with Reverse Attitude leads which always involve leading a spot card.

You probably already have your own agreements on what the lead of various honour cards means against a no-trump contract. If you and your partner both share the same agreement, then that is fine. If you don't already have an agreement, here's mine you can borrow. It isn't actually mine, but was devised by a Scandinavian bridge player called Vinje.

- 1) Never ever lead QJx!
- 2) A promises AK and no other honours, AK or AK(x)
- 3) K promises a LATE GAP sequence of AKJ(x) or KQT(x)
- 4) Q or J promise that this card is the top of a sequence: QJT(x), JT9(x) OR that there are TWO higher cards: AKQ(x), KQJ(x). AQJ(x)
- 5) There is no lead to show KQ(x) which suggests you should lead small from this holding or lead another suit.

To sum up Reverse Attitude leads for the very last time:

SMALL RAG=PLEASE RETURN THIS SUIT

BIG RAG=LOOK ELSEWHERE

The villagers of Eyam during the Black Death closed off their village and relied on people from neighbouring villages throwing the odd side of bacon or sack of turnips over the wall. I don't expect that, but a bit of feedback positive or negative would be appreciated and even suggestions for other aspects of bridge you would like me to pontificate about.