

ARTHUR'S HINTS ON LEADS.

If you could see all 4 hands we could all make perfect leads, but we are not completely blind. We can see our own hand and we can listen to the bidding, their bidding and partner's bidding. Listening and following these hints will not make your leads perfect, but they will make them better.

They have reached 3NT with no adverse bidding and they have failed to find a 4:4 major fit. Sometimes they haven't looked for one which suggests no 4 card major holdings and sometimes they have looked via Stayman and failed to find one. Whatever the case, they are generally playing in 3NT because they have at the most 7 cards in either major. This is why my first hint is:

HINT 1: IF IN ANY DOUBT, ALWAYS LEAD A MAJOR AGAINST 3NT RATHER THAN A MINOR.

Now comes the small print.

If you have a 5 card major it is invariably a good suit to lead.

If you have a short major (singleton or doubleton) that is generally even a better lead, for partner is likely to have 5 and will be thrilled and most impressed with your choice of suit to lead.

If you only have 4 and 3 card majors to lead, look carefully at their texture. It is generally a BAD idea to lead away from a 4 card suit headed by only the King or the Queen. Q from QJxx can be BAD because they can take your Queen in hand and finesse your Jack in dummy. Q from QJT is fine.

These restrictions mean that you will often find yourself leading from an honourless 3 card major instead of from your other major which is headed by just one honour. Your partner needs to know what the situation is, so your lead should show ATTITUDE to the suit you are leading. If you lead a highish card (7, 8,9,10) your partner should read that as a 3 card suit you have little interest in (although it could well be his long suit). He will know to look for another suit to return. If instead you had led a low card (2,3,4,5) he will know that your suit is at least 4 cards long and headed by at least one honour.

HINT 2: NEVER LEAD AN UNSUPPORTED ACE

A supported Ace is an Ace from an AK combination. An unsupported Ace is an Ace accompanied by any other cards than the King. So I repeat NEVER, NEVER, EVER LEAD AN UNSUPPORTED ACE against a trump contract. That being said, I imagine that once in every three hundred times or so, the lead of an unsupported ace might be successful. The reason why it is such a bad idea becomes clear when you imagine a situation where you have the Ace in a suit, Declarer has the King and Dummy has the Queen. If you lead the Ace, it flaps air and they make both their King and their Queen. If you don't lead the Ace, they will make only one of their honours for your Ace will top the honour in Declarer's hand.

Now this doesn't mean that you should lead AWAY from an unsupported Ace. That is almost as bad, in fact we should say NEVER LEAD AWAY FROM AN UNSUPPORTED ACE. Find

another suit to lead. Remember you don't have to make aggressive leads all the time. There are many hands where a passive lead is called for. The God of Bridge created Aces to swallow up Kings or Queens, not to flap the air.

HINT 3: DO NOT LEAD TRUMPS UNLESS YOU HAVE A POSITIVE REASON TO DO SO.

Some people look at each of the three off suits and decide they don't want to lead any of them and so lead trumps instead. This is essentially wrong. It is Declarer's first job to draw trumps. Don't make it easy for him. It is your job to establish winners in your suits. A good lead will give you a tempo. Remember, you don't always have to find an aggressive lead. Top of a nothing suit could work out well.

There are occasions when it is certainly correct to lead trumps. Listen to the bidding. If they both bid different suits and then settle on an agreed third suit as trumps then they are going to try to play the contract in some sort of a cross-ruff. They want to make their trumps in their two hands separately. Deny them the opportunity by leading trumps.

HINT 4: WHAT TO LEAD WHEN PARTNER OVERCALLED A SUIT.

If during the bidding your partner overcalled a suit, it is almost mandatory to lead that suit, but do not blindly lead your highest card in his suit. People should have a good suit to overcall, but sadly that is not always the case and just because partner overcalled a suit, does not mean that he has specific cards in the suit. If my highest card in partner's suit was the J, T, 9, 8 or 7, I would certainly lead it. But if I had one top honour in partner's suit (the Queen, the King or even sometimes the Ace!) I would lead a small card to let partner know I have an honour. Imagine that partner has overcalled on AT987, Declarer has Q62 and you have KJ4. If you lead the King, Declarer makes a trick. If you lead small, he doesn't.

HINT 5: WHAT TO LEAD WHEN THE OPPOSITION HAVE SHOWN A STRONG HOLDING IN TWO SUITS.

What is going to happen unless you are quick off the mark is that they are going to draw trumps and then get rid of all their losers on the off-suit. It is time to lead one of the other two suits and you may now make that forbidden lead of an unsupported ace or a low card away from just the queen or just the king.

HINT 6: PARTNER HAS OVERCALLED AND LEADS A HIGHISH CARD IN ANOTHER SUIT.

Partner has overcalled spades. They are playing in hearts and partner does not lead a spade. He leads the 9 of diamonds. What is happening. There is a faint chance that partner is leading a singleton diamond and is looking for a ruff. This is highly unlikely, but the bidding, your holding in diamonds and the appearance of dummy will clarify if that is the case. Usually that 9 of diamonds has a different meaning. It does NOT show an interest in diamonds. If partner were interested in diamonds, he would have led a low diamond. It does NOT indicate an interest in the HIGHER of the other suits simply because it is a highish diamond. It says quite simply, "you know I am not interested in diamonds, but you have heard me overcall spades. If you win this trick, please therefore return spades. So why didn't

partner lead spades himself? Because he has a holding like AQTxx or KJTxx. He is well brought up and he will not lead an unsupported ace nor away from an unsupported ace.

HINT 7: WHAT TO LEAD WHEN YOU HAVE AT LEAST FOUR OF THEIR TRUMP SUIT.

It is tempting to lead your short suit hoping that you can subsequently get ruffs, but this is not the best approach. You should lead your own long suit. You think this might be a waste of time because Declarer will ruff it, but this is a good thing. You want Declarer to ruff. If you can make him ruff twice, you are likely to finish up with more trumps than him and his hand will fall to pieces.

HINT 8: ADOPTING A STYLE OF PASSIVE LEADS AND ATTITUDE SIGNALLING ON LEAD.

Any fool knows what to lead when he has a suit headed by AKQ or KQJ, but by now you are probably getting a sense of what passive leads are. All you are doing is leading a HIGHISH card in a suit that you have no interest in. You are not trying to give count. You probably have three, but you could easily have two. You are showing a lack of interest in the suit you are leading. You are not showing suit preference for any other suit. You are suggesting a switch to the most logical suit based on the bidding by partner and the opposition and based on the appearance of dummy. There is almost a law of opposites in bridge. If you are long in a suit, partner is more likely to be short. If you are short in a suit, partner is more likely to be long. Because of this oddity, your top of nothing lead often hits partner's best suit most fortuitously. By now you are probably appreciating that the most useful lead you can make in bridge is often simply top of nothing.