

LATER LEADS AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

There is an old adage that the defense figures to lose a trick every time it breaks a new suit. Knowing when to do so (being "active" vs "passive") is one of the most difficult aspects of defense.

There are four basic situations: (1) Leading through weakness in dummy up to possible declarer strength; (2) Leading through one or more honors in dummy; (3) Leading through declarer up to weakness in dummy; and (4) Leading through declarer up to one or more honors in dummy. In all situations, non-honor leads tend to show attitude, not count: low from strength, high from weakness. When not playing a "pusher," follow suit to later leads with attitude, not count. The following general rules may be violated freely for tactical or deceptive reasons.

Leading Through Dummy's Weakness

When dummy has no card higher than the 10, treat the switch to a new suit mostly the same as an opening lead. However, the 9 is led from A98x or J98x when dummy has the 10. Otherwise you lead low from these holdings because the 9 implies 109 (and nothing higher). The 9 is not led from K98 or Q98, even if the 10 is in dummy. Look at this situation:

	1 0 7 6	
A 9 8 3		Q 5 4
	K J 2	

Regardless of whether North or South is dummy, West leads the 9. East must duck, letting the jack win. If West has led from four cards, East must not continue the suit later if declarer is to be denied a trick in the suit.. He can't play correctly if he has to allow for the K98 in the West hand. Another:

	1 0 7 6	
J 9 8 3		A 5 4
	K Q 2	

West leads the 9, dummy (correctly) plays the 10, and East wins. East knows that declarer has the KQ, so he can now switch to a more promising suit. If he had to allow for the queen or king in West's hand, he would not know to switch.

Leading Through Dummy's Strength

When dummy has one or cards higher than the 10, lead the top of any sequence, including interior sequences. For instance, if dummy has the queen, lead the jack from KJ10 or J109 and the 10 from 109. Scanian signals apply as usual when playing over dummy's finessable honor. See section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense.

The lead of the 9 from A98 or J98 applies in this situation also, because the 10 is led from 109. In the diagramed situation West is on lead:

Q32

J986

K54

A107

West leads the 9 and North plays low. East, if he has no fast entry, must duck the 9. If he plays the king, West will not be able to continue the suit when he gets in. But if East has the early entry, he must play the king on the first round (work it out). If South is declarer and West has led from A98 then East's play probably doesn't matter. When East ducks the with the king and the 10 wins the trick, West must lead the jack from J8 when he gets in (top of a sequence, now that the 9 and 10 are gone), not the 8. He would continue with the 8 only when holding A98 originally, telling East to play the king if he has it rather than duck again. Incidentally, the same plays apply if South is dummy.

Leading Up to Dummy's Weakness

When dummy is on the right with no ace or face card, revert to the same system of high card leads as is used for opening leads. The 10 promises higher strength as usual (e.g., A109.. , KJ10..), jack is highest card usually (but could be from AJx or KJx tripleton in some tactical situations), and the 9 tends to deny a card higher than the 10. However, it is the king that warns against unblocking in this case (it may be unsupported), and the ace requests it (e.g., AKJ10). Lead high from weakness, sometimes second best (e.g., 8 from 1086), even with length.

9876

A42

QJ105

K3

Declarer will surely play the king when East leads the 5. The play also gains if West has any singleton or declarer has a singleton king. Even when the holding is KQJx, leading the x is usually best unless two fast tricks are sufficient.

When leading low from four cards to an honor, semi-attitude is employed. Lead the lowest card from ace or queen, a middle-sized card (usually third best) from king or jack. Examples:

65

K1087

AJ42

Q93

East's lead of the 2 tells West that he has the ace or queen, so he can safely return the suit after winning South's 9 with the 10, not worrying that South may have started with AQ9.

76

AJ94

Q832

K105

When East leads the 2, South plays the 10, and West wins declarer's 10 with the jack, West knows the lead is from the queen and that South has the king.

65

AJ94

K872

Q103

East's lead of the 7 may not be entirely clear to West, but with the 2 and 3 missing when South plays the 10, he can assume that East has the king.

654

AQ9

J873

K102

East's lead of the 7 is ambiguous: Does he have the king or the jack? Perhaps the less encouraging 8 would be a better lead, even though it would look like top of nothing.

652

K104

J873

AQ9

Now East's lead of the 7 will be read as probably coming from the jack. After winning South's 9 with the 10, West switches.

Some holdings will be troublesome for this system of leads, and the absence of any length indication can also cause difficulty. It may be better to lead the honor from Hxx, and partner should not assume that an honor lead is from the top of a sequence. When the lead is "last train," the last opportunity to take tricks, the highest card is routinely led and partner must not assume that it's from a sequence unless giving up an overtrick is deemed unimportant.

Leading Up to Dummy's Strength

When dummy has one or more cards higher than the 10, lead the top of standard sequences, but the 10 from any internal sequence and the 9 from 109. The 10 therefore promises something higher than the jack (AJ10, KJ10, K109, or Q109).

This policy is especially important when leading up to dummy's queen from J109 or KJ10. The lead of the jack permits partner to duck with the ace, waiting for a lead through declarer's king. The lead of the 10 tells partner to play the ace, as the lead is from KJ10.

As with opening leads, lead the 8 from A98 or J98, but fourth-best Q98 or K98. For example:

Q54 (dummy)

A76

J983

K102

South is known to have no more than three cards in the suit. East leads the 8, not the 3, up to dummy's queen. West knows that East cannot have KJ83, so he takes his ace and switches instead of uselessly

returning the suit. If West had the 10, he would know to duck the 8 lead, waiting for East to lead through again.

Yes, East could have KJ98, what then? That would give South 1032. East would just have to lead the 9, which will look like a lead from 109. This is unlikely to hurt, as West will probably continue the suit in order to set up a long card in the East hand.

Tactical Considerations

When deciding to break a suit like Axx, Kxx, or sometimes even Qxx, hoping partner has length as well as a high card in the suit, it is often best to lead the high card. Leading low could result in the suit being blocked if partner misguesses what you have led from. He might play high when he should play low to preserve his only entry. Leading the high card, then a low card, makes it easier for him to duck.

There is a general rule to follow when leading up to (not through) dummy: If you have dummy's best card in a suit "surrounded," plus a higher card, pretend dummy's card is in your hand and lead according to standard leads:

Dummy Holds:	You Hold:	Lead:
10xx	KJ9, AJ9	J
9xx	Q108, K108, A108	10
Jxx	AQ10	Q

In each case, putting the "surrounded" card in the defender's hand would create an interior sequence, from which the standard lead is the top of the sequence. Doing so puts dummy's high card out of the picture, rendering it valueless to declarer. Actually the same leads should be made even if that lowest card is not held. If partner has the necessary spot card(s), the lead will gain. If not too bad; leading low would not help.

The same leads are made when it is declarer's hand that may have the "surrounded" card and a trappable honor is in dummy. For instance, lead the jack from KJ9 (or any KJx, for that matter) when leading through dummy's queen. If partner has A10x, he will thank you for not leading low and making him guess who has the jack. If declarer has the 10, he can't force out the ace by ducking in dummy, as a low lead would let him do.

The following diagram shows three common situations. In each one East is on lead and must lead the queen or the jack, not ace or low, if he hopes to get three fast tricks. South must guess right in order to make a trick, since East might have QJx and make the same play. Against good players South should invoke the rule of restricted choice and cover, making the assumption that East does not have QJ when he leads the queen or jack. Note that it doesn't matter whether North or South is dummy.

1072

J83	AQ96
AJ8	Q963
AQ8	J963

K52

The following are more advanced situations. You are West on lead, and again it doesn't matter whether North or South is dummy:

J8

A1065	Q73
-------	-----

K942

Lead the ace, East unblocking with the 7. South may hold up on the next round, but that can't be helped. At least East-West will grab two quick tricks and the 10 will be established. If the 8 and 6 were interchanged, then the lead of the 10 leaves South helpless if East can get the lead later.

97

A1086	Q32
-------	-----

KJ54

Lead the 10. East plays low and then leads the queen upon gaining the lead.

98

AJ65	1072
------	------

KQ43

Lead the jack. East unblocks with the 7 and leads the 10 when gaining the lead.

10

AQ862	974
-------	-----

KJ53

Lead the queen.

108

AQ75	J43
------	-----

K962

Lead the queen.

J9
Q1064 **K83**
A752

Lead the queen, East unblocking with the 8. The play is the same if the king and queen are interchanged, of course.

104
KJ83 **Q72**
A953

Lead the king or jack; a lead of the 3 may work too slowly. The same play is made if 9x is in dummy and South may have A10xx (an easy play to miss, so look for it!).

107
AJ84 **Q63**
K952

Lead the jack, continue with the 4 when next on lead.

Q3
KJ83 **A94**
10762

Lead the king, partner unblocking with the 9. If you are East, lead the 9 and hope partner continues.