BARRY RIGAL

BREAKING THE BRIDGE RULES

FIRST HAND PLAY

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INTRODUCTION

Any discussion as to what makes bridge so challenging, and so infuriating, as well as addictive, is one that could potentially go on for hours. One thing is clear: while bridge is a game that can be played by the application of rules, anyone who follows that approach rigidly will only get so far, and no farther. The problem is that while a set of rules tends to give you an idea of what to do in general, there is no certainty that the specific problem you face can be solved by the application of a general principle. The principle may deal with a similar position, but if it is not identical, an entirely different approach may be required.

This book, which is planned as the first of four, is based on a series of articles that were originally published in *Bridge Magazine*. The articles discussed many of the 'standard' cardplay rules, which most players will have encountered and perhaps tended to assume are nearly always right. In a famous scene from the poker movie, *The Cincinnati Kid*, the Man, a character played by Edward G. Robinson, gets to utter the line, 'That's what it's all about, kid… making the wrong move at the right time'. In this first book of the series, we shall be looking at situations where the player who is on lead to a trick should seriously consider doing the 'wrong' thing: this may be on opening lead, or it may (more frequently) be in the middle of the deal. In the latter case, the player may be either the declarer or one of the defenders.

So, while the rules may in fact be very good guides in most circumstances, the object of these books is to try to convince you that you should not treat them as gospel. Sometimes your own instincts will tell you what is the right thing to do — and if that means 'breaking the bridge rules', so be it!

1 THE OPENING LEAD

Despite the title of this book, there is no denying that many situations in cardplay can be correctly addressed by applying general rules, and in no area of the game is that so true as it is for the opening lead. There is a reason for that: the opening lead is the one truly blind play in the game. After the lead is made, everyone gets to see the dummy, and that allows both declarer and defender to apply a different sort of logic to the play — one that is not based on quite such a scarcity of hard information. However, the opening lead is very much a shot in the dark, where the defender has to fall back on trusting his opponents' and his partner's bidding (or lack thereof) to build up a picture of the whole deal if he can.

There are many standard rules with which the opening leader can arm himself in order to have a good chance of selecting the best lead. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Lead the top card from a sequence of three or more cards.
2. Where you have an interior sequence such as AJ10x(x) or K109xx, lead a card from the sequence.
3. Never underlead an ace against a suit contract.
4. Lead fourth highest from a broken suit[1].
5. Always lead partner's suit unless you know it to be wrong.
6. From a two-card honor sequence (a holding like QJxx, KQxx or AKxx), lead fourth highest against notrump but lead an honor against a suit.

Each of the above rules has a great deal of common sense to it, but let's take a look at them from the point of view of when they might *not* apply.

1 If your preference is to lead third and fifth, or some other similar convention, then mentally substitute it here and throughout the book when you read 'fourth-best'. The generic rule we are discussing is to lead a low card from these holdings.

UNDERLEADING AN HONOR SEQUENCE

One of the very first deals I can remember playing at the age of twelve involved my leading fourth highest from QJ10432 and finding that it cost me a trick, which scared me into leading the top card from sequences for a year or two. However, there are times to consider an alternative approach — such as when you decide to attack a suit in which declarer or dummy is known to hold length.

The following deal comes from the Senior European Pairs — a matchpoint event where every overtrick and undertrick was vital.

Neither vul.

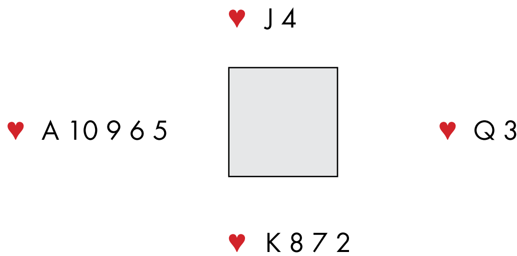
West		East
	North ♠ A K 9 4 2 ♥ 4 3 ♦ 9 2 ♣ K 10 9 6	
♠ Q J 10 6 5 ♥ A J 9 7 ♦ A ♣ A 4 2		♠ 8 7 ♥ 8 6 2 ♦ Q 5 4 3 ♣ 8 7 5 3
	South ♠ 3 ♥ K Q 10 5 ♦ K J 10 8 7 6 ♣ Q J	

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♦
pass	2♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

The player on lead holding the West cards was none other than José Damiani, the president of the World Bridge Federation at the time. His lead of a low spade worked like a charm. Declarer, distracted by the dangers of losing a spade cheaply, made the quite logical play of winning in dummy with the ♠A to run the ♦9. Damiani won this and led another low spade! Again declarer followed a quite rational line when he took this in dummy with the ♠K and played another diamond. Even though South switched his attention to clubs when the bad diamond split came to light, Damiani now had six winners to cash in his own hand, for down two and a fine score. Had José led or shifted to a top spade, declarer would have escaped for down one at worst, and a much better result.

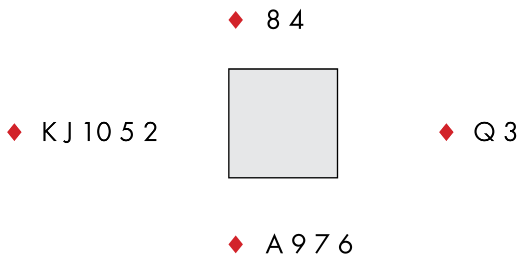
The same principle applies when leading from a suit such as KQJxx through a five-card suit in dummy, or when holding AKJx in front of a long suit in dummy. Bridge literature is full of successes achieved by leading a low card — players like Zia seem to do it all the time (but for some reason the literature is not quite so full of counter-examples where declarer has been allowed to score the first trick with a singleton ten!).

The same general thematic approach extends to leading from an interior sequence. If you have a high honor and a three-card interior sequence — a holding such as A1098x or KJ109x — the leads of the ten and the jack respectively are almost completely safe. However, the same is far from true of a sequence such as A10965 or KJ1052. Sometimes the lead of the ten in the first instance will cost a trick; sometimes it will block the suit. Consider the two following layouts in a single suit:



The lead of small card allows you to run the suit as soon as you get in; the lead of the nine or ten will leave declarer with a second stopper in the suit.

This position is similar:



Here, the lead of the ten does not necessarily cost a trick, but if East puts up the queen on the first round, declarer can take that card with the ace and set up a second stopper for himself. However, if East ducks the first round, so does declarer, and he also ducks the queen on the next trick as well. Now West needs two entries to set up and run the suit, as opposed to just the one entry that would have been required if he had led low to the first trick. Perhaps that

means that West's strategy at Trick 1 should be influenced by how many entries he has on the side. Certainly that was going through Karen McCallum's mind on this next deal from a match between the USA and the Netherlands in the 1989 Venice Cup in Perth, Australia.

North-South vul.

	North	
	♠ A Q 8 3 ♥ A 2 ♦ J 7 2 ♣ K 9 7 3	
West ♠ 10 9 5 4 ♥ J 7 ♦ K Q 10 5 3 ♣ 8 5		**East** ♠ K 7 2 ♥ 9 8 6 5 ♦ A 6 ♣ J 6 4 2
	South ♠ J 6 ♥ K Q 10 4 3 ♦ 9 8 4 ♣ A Q 10	

West	North	East	South
		pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

After identical auctions in the two rooms, the Dutch West led a normal top diamond and found that this had permanently blocked the suit. East ducked the first trick, of course, and won the next diamond, but declarer guessed hearts and had ten easy tricks.

By contrast, McCallum, on opening lead at the other table, deduced that declarer probably would have nine tricks on power unless the defense could cash out the diamonds. If declarer had the ace then a top diamond lead would be best — but her own lack of entries meant that if declarer could hold up the ace for two rounds, the suit would be dead. It looked better to play partner for a top diamond honor; that being the case, a low diamond lead catered for precisely the existing position — here, virtue was rewarded handsomely. Notice that a low diamond lead here also caters for the case where declarer has J9xx of diamonds and partner again has a doubleton ace.

UNDERLEADING AN ACE AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT

The most traditional rules about opening leads against suit contracts include a strict prohibition on underleading an ace. The logic behind this is that if anyone at the table has a singleton then the underlead of an ace will cost a trick more often than not. Also, if declarer has an honor in the suit led, the underlead may allow him a cheap trick. Again, this rule applies in broad general terms and there are always going to be exceptions.

The most important exception is that when defending against a slam in which dummy has implied the king in a suit where you have an ace, the underlead may put declarer to a guess that he is a favorite to get wrong. For example, on the following auction:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♦	pass	5♥
pass	6♥	all pass	

dummy will have a second-round club control, because South's jump to 5♥ demanded that North bid slam with a club control, and he cooperated. However, North will not have a first-round control because he did not bid 4♣ over 3♠. Accordingly, one should lead a low club on this auction from a doubleton or tripleton ace or queen.

Imagine that the North-South hands look like this:

♠ 8 3
♥ A K 4 2
♦ A Q J 7 2
♣ K 9

♠ A Q
♥ Q J 10 8 6 3
♦ K 4
♣ J 7 2

I do not fancy being in declarer's shoes on a small club lead!

You should also consider underleading an ace when dummy has shown a strong balanced hand (for example by opening a strong notrump), or in any situation where in a slam-try auction declarer has specifically denied a first- or second-round control in a particular suit. Occasionally, on a game-going auction where the opponents finish in five of a minor having bid three suits but never tried for notrump, you should follow the same reasoning. With A10x or AJx, consider leading low: the underlead may be necessary to cash three tricks in the suit if declarer has Qxx and dummy has three small cards.

The first card Geir Helgemo put on the table in the Bermuda Bowl in 1993 turned out to be an underlead of an ace, and indeed it was the only way to defeat an apparently comfortable game. At that time, while Helgemo at the age of 23 had already become a star back home in Norway, he was probably seen elsewhere as just another promising junior. Peter Weichsel and Robert Levin, who were playing for the USA against Helgemo and Tor Helness, probably got quite an unpleasant surprise on this deal.

	♠ K Q 6 4 ♥ A 10 ♦ K 6 5 ♣ A Q 9 4	
♠ J 8 ♥ K 8 6 ♦ A 10 9 8 2 ♣ K 10 8		♠ A 10 ♥ J 9 7 3 2 ♦ 7 3 ♣ 7 6 3 2
	♠ 9 7 5 3 2 ♥ Q 5 4 ♦ Q J 4 ♣ J 5	

The standard contract throughout the field was 4♠ by South after an unopposed sequence such as 1♣-1♠-4♠, making ten or eleven tricks. In the USA-Norway match, Levin was declarer, and, as if he had seen all the cards, Helgemo led the ♦10. Declarer won the trick and played on trumps, but when he got in with the ♠A, Helness played a diamond to the ace and got his ruff. Recognizing that the heart suit was frozen, Helness now carefully exited with a club. Declarer later had to concede a heart trick, for down one. An impressive start for Helgemo in his career on the world stage.

The other common reason for underleading an ace (and often also for underleading a whole sequence) is to put partner on lead so that he can either find the killing shift or give you a ruff. Like every such maneuver, part of the

thrill of making this play is the chance that it might backfire. Consider the problem faced by Albamonte (West) of Italy from the qualifying rounds of the World Junior Team Championships in Bali in 1995.

East-West vul.

	♠ 8 6 ♥ A K 8 2 ♦ J 10 6 4 ♣ J 7 6	
♠ A Q 7 5 4 3 2 ♥ 7 4 3 ♦ — ♣ K 4 2		♠ J 10 9 ♥ J 9 ♦ 8 5 2 ♣ A Q 10 9 5
	♠ K ♥ Q 10 6 5 ♦ A K Q 9 7 3 ♣ 8 3	

In the Closed Room, both sides did really well in the auction. The Canadian East-West pair managed to find the big double fit and competed to the five-level successfully on their 17-count. East, as a passed hand, was able to raise his partner's 1♠ overcall via a fit-showing jump in clubs. That was just what West wanted to hear and he eventually bid on to 5♠, over which South sacrificed in 6♦. No one could double that, and the defense duly took their top winners for down two. Of course, the fact that East-West had *three* winners to take against a red-suit contract was rather disappointing from the Canadian perspective; it meant that no five-level contract by their North-South partners would make — or would it?

This was the auction we saw on Vugraph from the table:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Albamonte	*Levy*	*Versace*	*Blond*
		pass	1♦
3♠	dbl	4♠	5♥
all pass			

The Italian West chose a more active preempt at his first turn, and now his partner simply raised to game. The double fit never came to light, and the Italians under-competed as a result. This should not have been a tragedy, since 5♥ was going down somewhere between one and three tricks, depending on

whether the defense could find their diamond ruffs. Take a look at Albamonte's problem on opening lead, though. His plan for the defense was to put his partner in to give him a diamond ruff (of course, that would have been only two tricks for the defense anyway, and perhaps his thinking should have gone a little deeper than that). He decided that the most likely high card he could find in his partner's hand was the ♠K. Following this logic, his choice of opening lead was the ♠7, which did not paralyze declarer, and the third defensive winner duly went down the tubes.

MISLEADING PARTNER WITH YOUR SPOT CARD LEAD

'Fourth highest' is a very sensible rule — it frequently enables a partnership to work out immediately whether there is any future in the suit led. After all, if partner leads a two (thereby promising only a four-card suit) and you have only two cards in that suit, you know the opponents have you outgunned, in quantity if not in quality. However, the key idea in this concept is that 'fourth highest' is a ***partnership*** issue. If you as a defender know that partner will not be playing a significant role in the defense, there's no harm done if you mislead him — so long as you believe declarer will be even more confused.

Suppose that you are on lead against 3NT after the following auction

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
1♣	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A K 3
♥ Q J 4
♦ 6 5
♣ A 9 7 6 2

If you lead a sneaky ♣2 from this hand, you are hoping that the full deal looks something like this:

♠ Q 6 4
♥ A K 10 7 2
♦ J 9
♣ Q 8 4

♠ A K 3
♥ Q J 4
♦ 6 5
♣ A 9 7 6 2

♠ 8 5
♥ 8 5 3
♦ Q 10 8 7 3 2
♣ 10 3

♠ J 10 9 7 2
♥ 9 6
♦ A K 4
♣ K J 5

You want declarer to believe that clubs are 4-3 and play to set up spades — without risking his future on the uncertainty of the heart suit. When you win the first spade you will lead another low club, of course, rather than cashing the ace and playing another club, which would give the whole game away. Eventually you should get in again in spades to cash out the clubs for down one.

Now suppose you hold this instead:

♠ A K 5 3
♥ J 4
♦ Q 6 5
♣ A 9 7 2

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

Now you might try leading the ♣7, trying to look like someone with at least a five-card suit. This time you want declarer to feel that playing on spades is hopeless — better to go for the double finesse in hearts rather than play on spades and suffer almost certain defeat. You are looking for the following layout:

	♠ Q 6 4 ♥ A K 10 7 2 ♦ J 9 ♣ Q 8 4	
♠ A K 5 3 ♥ J 4 ♦ Q 6 5 ♣ A 9 7 2		♠ 8 ♥ Q 8 5 3 ♦ 10 8 7 3 2 ♣ 10 6 3
	♠ J 10 9 7 2 ♥ 9 6 ♦ A K 4 ♣ K J 5	

If declarer plays on hearts after winning the first club, then by the time he discovers hearts are unfriendly, the defenders have five tricks established.

The common factor on both of these hands is that you know from the auction that partner has very little in the way of high cards. So as opening leader you can be reasonably confident that partner will not get the lead and do the wrong thing as a result of the false message that you have sent him. As a general rule on defense, the weak hand needs to help the strong hand, but the reverse does not hold true. Incidentally, as declarer that is a point worth bearing in mind — if you think only one opponent is telling the truth with his signals, believe the player who appears to have fewer high cards.

NOT LEADING PARTNER'S SUIT

Whether or not to lead partner's suit is always a thorny problem. There are many good reasons to lead partner's suit without going too deeply into the rights and wrongs of things. The psychological reason, which everyone will appreciate, is that if you are wrong, you are at least only guilty of too much trust. Leading something else and finding it to be wrong is likely to aggravate partner intensely — and we can all do without that. However, if you are self-confident enough to be able to weather such an outcome, there are times when leading your own suit may be right.

The first thing to think about is how likely partner is to have a good suit for his entry into the auction. If he has opened the bidding with a minor, and the opponents drive to notrump, be wary of leading his suit. The fact that opponents do not explore for a major-suit fit, but play notrump, may be another reason to look for an alternative lead. Conversely, partner's major-suit opening bid is likely to be based on a better, or at least longer, suit. If partner

overcalls and the opponents head for notrump, the rather paradoxical inference may be that the weaker partner's hand appears to be, the better his suit is likely to be. Think about the following auction:

West	North	East	South
pass	1♥	1♠	1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

If you hold a scattered eight-count, you can be reasonably confident that partner has no more than an eight-count himself. So why did he bother to throw in an overcall that consumed no space? Answer: assuming you trust his bidding, he should have a good suit. However, if the opponents had opened 1♣ and not 1♥, that inference might be less sound: he might have elected to make the overcall simply to use up the opponents' bidding space.

The time that you should consider leading your own suit is when at least one opponent has specifically denied holding your suit (by responding and bypassing your suit or by bidding notrump rather than making a negative double). For example, on the auction:

West	North	East	South
pass	1♣	1♥	1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

a spade lead from

♠ K J 7 5 3
♥ 7 3
♦ 7 4 3
♣ Q J 9

looks quite reasonable to me. Your likely slow entry in clubs gives you a number of chances even if partner does not come through with the goods in spades. Be ready to apologize if you are wrong, though!

Against a suit contract, nothing could be more attractive than to lead a singleton in partner's known suit — could it? Well, circumstances alter cases. The following deal had a significant impact on who won the 1999 Cavendish Pairs (in which the prize money for the winners was approximately a quarter of a million dollars).

East-West vul.

	North	
	♠ Q ♥ J 7 4 2 ♦ K 4 2 ♣ A K Q 5 3	
West ♠ J 6 4 3 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ 6 ♣ J 10 8 4 2		**East** ♠ 10 ♥ A 9 6 ♦ Q J 10 9 8 5 ♣ 9 7 6
	♠ A K 9 8 7 5 2 ♥ Q 10 5 ♦ A 7 3 ♣ —	

West	North	East	South
K.Sanborn	*Smith*	*S.Sanborn*	*Cohen*
		3♦	4♠
pass	5♣	pass	5♦
pass	5♠	all	pass

With a couple of rounds to go in the Cavendish Pairs, Ron Smith and Billy Cohen were in hot pursuit of the big prize. In the end, though, they finished third, and this was one of the deals that took them out of contention. In the course of the auction above, Cohen made a slightly exuberant jump to 4♠ — bidding 3♠ might have been enough. At that point North felt he was worth one slam try, and after that, although the auction subsided at the five-level, the damage had been done. The point was that although there is scarcely a more attractive lead than a singleton in partner's suit, West now knew better. Kerri Sanborn had been listening to the auction, which implied some concern about the heart suit, and more importantly, she knew her spade trick would not run away. She unerringly led a heart: the defense cashed their two heart tricks, then sat back and waited for their trump trick.

LEADING HIGH FROM A TWO-CARD HONOR SEQUENCE AGAINST NOTRUMP

It is tougher to judge when to break my sixth rule. We are all reasonably familiar with the conundrum of when to lead the top card from a holding such as J1076, QJ84 or KQ62. My guess is that most people would lead an honor against a suit contract and a low card against notrump.

The idea behind leading a top card from the king-queen holding against a suit contract is simply to establish a trick for your side — the slow winners it establishes for declarer may be less important. At notrump, players tend not to have formulated a rule quite so clearly, but my instinct is that most people tend to lead low from all of these holdings. My experience has been that the low card lead tends to be right — but as usual there are exceptions! The main exception is that whenever declarer has shown a strong balanced hand (a strong notrump or better), leading low from QJxx is a bad idea, particularly if dummy has shown any sort of distribution. The disadvantage in leading low from QJxx is that if declarer has the ace-king, which such auctions make far more likely than the ***a priori*** percentages, you are very likely to be giving him a cheap trick. To be fair, however, even if dummy has one of the ace or king, there is a reasonable probability that this will be part of a doubleton holding, in which case you will probably not have cost your side a trick. As to leading from a king-queen holding in such circumstances, I suggest you lead an honor so long as your lead style allows you to differentiate between strong and weak king-queen holdings, and otherwise to avoid leading the suit altogether if you have a practical alternative.

For an example of the queen-jack lead paying off, we go to a deal from a 1982 British Gold Cup match where the opening lead represented the difference between winning and losing a close encounter.

Neither vul.

West		East
	North ♠ Q 10 6 4 2 ♥ 10 4 2 ♦ K 4 ♣ J 7 3	
♠ J 3 ♥ Q J 8 3 ♦ 10 8 6 ♣ A 10 4 2		♠ K 8 7 5 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ Q J 5 2 ♣ 8 5
	South ♠ A 9 ♥ A K 7 ♦ A 9 7 3 ♣ K Q 9 6	

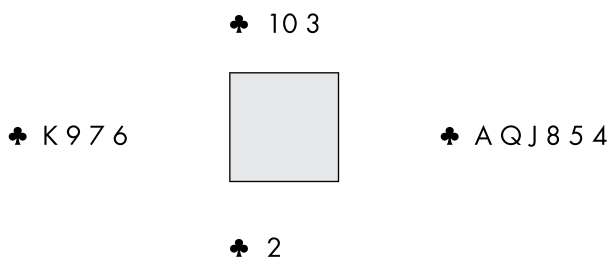
West	North	East	South
	pass	pass	2NT
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	3NT	all pass	

At one table, a low heart lead allowed declarer to win cheaply by putting up the ten, and now he could first build a spade trick and then set up two more in clubs for nine tricks. In the other room the ♥Q was led: it went around to declarer's king, and he then decided to play on spades first rather than clubs. (In fact, the contract was unmakable on any normal line of play, but broaching clubs first would have given the defense more chances to err.) East won with the ♠K and cleared the hearts, and now declarer had to fall back on the club suit when spades failed to behave. When clubs, too, failed to generate enough tricks, declarer had no shots left in his locker.

LEADING UNSUPPORTED HONORS

Unless you are Zia, or have a reputation to protect as a player with more flair and imagination than common sense, you will rarely lead an unsupported honor — other than an ace — without something that passes for justification. There are, however, several reasons for deciding to depart from the standard lead of a low card from a holding of three or four cards to a top honor. Indeed, you may sometimes think the situation requires you to lead top from three cards to a nine or ten.

The most obvious reason for this sort of lead is that your partner has actually bid the suit in question, and your LHO has announced strength in that suit. Alternatively, partner may have doubled the opponent's natural or artificial call to show this particular suit. The idea behind leading a high card is to remain on lead so that you can either continue the suit through dummy's vulnerable holding or find a switch after having seen dummy: leading a low card may put partner on play, unable to do either of those things. The typical situation when a high card has the most going for it arises when you have a weak hand and have raised partner's opening or overcall, and your RHO becomes declarer in a trump contract. The suit layout may be like this:

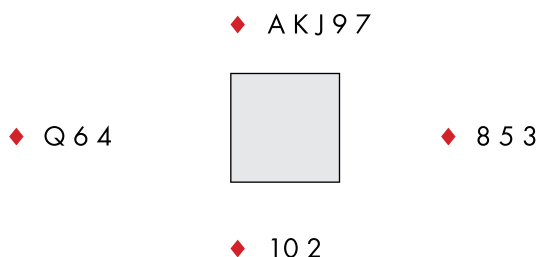


Leading the king will give you a chance to switch or continue depending on partner's signal.

This approach has the more than occasional drawback that leading an unsupported king may make partner believe that you, and not declarer, possess the queen in the suit — and the consequences of that might be fatal. Also, while your king is favorite to retain the lead, when declarer turns up with the ace or a void you may have cost yourself a trick by trying to be too clever. The other real problem is that partner does not know the count in the suit — whereas a spot-card lead will often give him the true count, particularly if you play third and fifth leads in partner's suit.

Another reason to be a little cautious with these unusual leads is that if you lead high from three or four small, partner may play you for a doubleton. Particularly in a suit contract, partner may misjudge declarer's shortness and set up the suit for him, or try to cash too many winners in the suit, so you need to be sure that this will not happen before making the play of the top card from three or four small. My advice is that whenever you have raised a suit and are thus unlikely to hold two cards, lead high from three small — otherwise lead a low card. Never lead MUD under any circumstances from three small! (In fact if you learn nothing from this book except never to lead MUD from a three-card suit, you will be immeasurably better off!) The net effect of these warnings is not that you should never make these leads, but you should certainly consider them to be the exception, as opposed to the norm.

Another, and relatively rare reason for shifting to an honor is to execute a variation of the Merrimac Coup (a tactic that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), to disrupt declarer's communications. Consider the following layout:



Declarer threatens to win whatever you play in some other suit and run five tricks here. However, if you switch to the ♦Q you prevent declarer from having communications backwards and forwards in the suit — and that might be fatal to him. Sounds unlikely to occur in real life? Well, the first ever BOLS Brilliancy Prize went to Australia's Ron Klinger, who saw his opportunity to do exactly that at the 1976 World Team Olympiad in Monte Carlo. This description of the deal comes from *Fit for a King*, a book of bridge brilliancies collected by Sally Brock and myself.

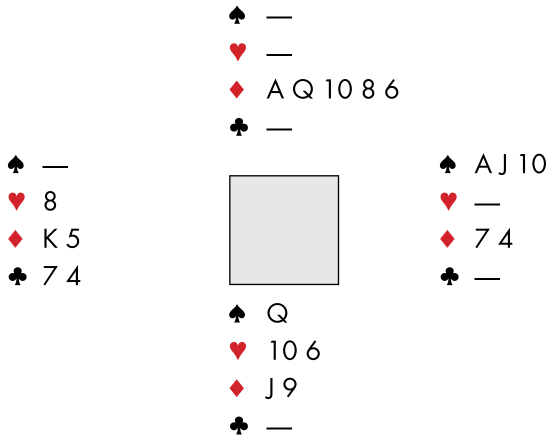
Neither vul.

	North	
	♠ 2 ♥ 9 5 ♦ A Q 10 8 6 3 2 ♣ K 8 5	
West ♠ 7 4 ♥ K 8 4 3 ♦ K 5 ♣ A 7 4 3 2		**East** ♠ A K J 10 8 6 3 ♥ 7 ♦ 7 4 ♣ J 9 6
	♠ Q 9 5 ♥ A Q J 10 6 2 ♦ J 9 ♣ Q 10	

West	North	East	South
Klinger	*Soloway*	*Longhurst*	*Rubin*
pass	pass	3♠	4♥
all pass			

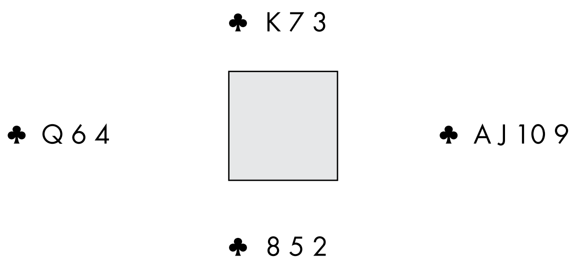
West led a spade and, hoping to cut down declarer's ruffs, East switched to a trump. Declarer played the queen, because he wanted to be in his hand if West ducked. Klinger made the first essential play for the defense when he played low — had he won the ♥K, declarer would have made his contract with no problems because he could simply have drawn trumps and taken the diamond finesse.

At Trick 3 declarer ruffed a spade, removing West's last card in the suit, and played a club to his queen rather than to the ten. West won the ♣A and returned a club to dummy's king. Declarer now needed to draw trumps, so he ruffed a club and played the ♥A and ♥J. This was the position, with declarer needing to make the rest and West on lead:



Klinger now found the only play to defeat the contract: he switched to the ♦K, severing declarer's communications. Declarer could win in dummy and come to hand with the ♦J to draw West's last trump, but then he would have to lose a spade at the end. If, as happened in practice, declarer played three rounds of diamonds to discard his spade loser, West would make his ♥8. On any other return declarer would have been able to win in hand, draw the last trump and run diamonds to discard his spade loser.

Yet another reason to consider an eccentric opening lead arises after a lead-directing double, which may persuade you to try something unusual. For example, in a deal from the 1988 Camrose Trials, when I was playing against an otherwise generally competent player, the layout of the key side suit looked like this:

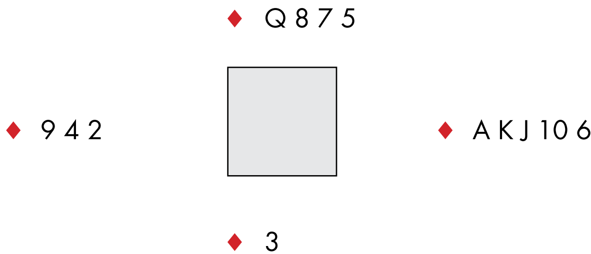


Somehow my partner and I (always optimistic at the best of times) got into a control-bidding sequence and East happily doubled when, as North, I made a control bid in this suit. Eventually we signed off in four of a major, and West led the ♣4, allowing my partner in the fullness of time to wrap up eleven tricks. Had West led his queen, the defense would have taken the first three tricks, and the thirteenth club would have promoted a trump. East was a person who is

rarely beaten to the draw with a sarcastic comment, but before he could open his mouth to berate his partner, West himself went on the attack, asking how he could have been expected to know to make the killing lead. The rest of us were temporarily stunned into silence.

In retrospect, the real reason for West to get this right was that while the queen lead might cost a trick, in practice his defenseless hand suggested that this would not be critical in any auction where his opponents had made a slam try. The relative significance of possibly gifting the opponents an overtrick was far less important than that leading the queen might let the defense cash out the suit, while the lead of a low card would make that much less likely.

By extension of the above philosophy, you might also lead the top card from three cards to a nine or ten if you think the situation requires you to do so — typically after you have decided to attack dummy's suit. Sometimes this is because the auction demands it — perhaps dummy has responded in a suit and declarer has either shown the other three suits, or has revealed a two-suiter with a guard in the third suit. Sometimes partner has doubled a notrump contract with lead-directing overtones. If you have three cards in dummy's suit, declarer is virtually marked with a singleton at best, so the idea of leading a high card to remain on lead is an attractive one. Consider this possible layout of the key suit:



When East slips in a lead-directing double of a 3NT contract, West has to make his opening lead the ♦9 rather than the ♦2 if he wants to cash out the suit for the defense immediately — and there may not be a second chance. Equally, when a fourth-suit sequence has led to a notrump contract with declarer suggesting real shortage in dummy's first-bid suit, you might choose to attack that suit with a high card from a three-card holding. On a good day, your queen lead pins declarer's bare jack or ten. On a bad day, declarer has a bare ace or king…

WHICH SUIT TO LEAD?

Another standard rule suggests that your side should often lead the unbid suit, or the fourth suit. However, leading dummy's first-bid suit is also quite plausible on an auction where partner is marked with values but has not bid. In the 1994 World Pairs semi-final I remember holding a three-count with three small hearts in second seat and hearing the auction go pass on my right, pass by me, and 1♥ on my left, converted to 1NT by my right-hand opponent. When this got passed out, it was clear my partner had an opening bid — and that made it very likely he was looking at length if not strength in hearts or he might have acted on his first or second turn. I missed the inference at the table, but there was certainly a good case for a heart lead here — and if so, the ♥9 from my ♥974 was surely the right lead. The full deal produced sparkling play at another table — indeed, it might well be suitable for inclusion in a book on plays by second hand as well.

East-West vul.

North:
♠ 9 6 3 2
♥ A K J 3
♦ 10 9
♣ A 10 4

West:
♠ K 10 4
♥ 9 7 4
♦ 6 5 2
♣ 9 6 3 2

East:
♠ A J 7
♥ Q 10 8 5
♦ A K 3
♣ 8 7 5

South:
♠ Q 8 5
♥ 6 2
♦ Q J 8 7 4
♣ K Q J

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	pass	dbl	rdbl
all pass			

My pathetic club lead conceded 120, but Jimmy Cayne as South on the above auction had his work cut out on Lars Blakset's ♥9 lead. Leading the top heart is better than a small heart lead — declarer could duck the ♥4 and be better

placed in some variations. As it was, he took the ♥A, and played the ♦9, which held the trick, then led another diamond, won by Jens Auken as East, who then switched to a low spade. To make the contract, Cayne now had to produce the nice play of going up with the ♠Q, which he did. This would gain if both spade honors were right (almost impossible or East would surely have bid 1NT over 1♥) but would also gain when, as here, the spades became blocked and this prevented West from getting in a second time in the suit. West won the trick with the ♠K and played a second heart, but Cayne could win with the ♥K and clear the diamonds. The defense could cash out six tricks, but no more.

MAJORS OR MINORS?

When the opponents bid only notrump, the prevailing wisdom is that when faced with a choice between a major or a minor you should generally lead the major. The negative inference from the failure to explore for a major fit is that dummy is unlikely to be loaded with the majors. However this is a slight overstatement of the case: when dummy holds a major but is 4-3-3-3 or even 4-4-3-2 with values in the short suits, he may have chosen not to use Stayman. This is in part because of the additional information it gives the opponents — not to mention the inferences available from the double of Stayman or the lack of such a double.

Conversely there are several situations where you should go for the minor-suit lead rather than a major suit. Consider the following auction at teams:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

If you are on lead with a flat yarborough and three cards in each black suit, the natural inclination is to lead spades — a major rather than a minor. Wrong! To set this contract you need partner to hold the suit you lead, together with an opening bid or so, yet not to have acted at his first turn. Which suit might he have and still fail to act? Spades or clubs? The answer is obvious — with spades he would always bid, but he might have stayed silent with a moderate five-card club suit. Accordingly, a club lead is far more promising than a spade lead.

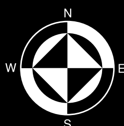
It is different when you have equivalent holdings in two suits but infer that you need to cash out one suit or the other to beat the opponent's contract. Say the opponents bid 1♣-1♠-3NT, with declarer promising a long club suit. If you have to choose between Jxx of hearts and Kxx of diamonds, the diamond suit offers a much better chance of running five tricks on the go, so you should lead that suit.

ADVANCED

MAKING THE WRONG MOVE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Rules are made to be broken, and bridge is no exception. The first of a planned four-book series on cardplay, this book deals with situations where the player who is on lead — defender or declarer, at the start of the deal or in the middle — needs to do something that involves ostensibly 'breaking the rules'. Not, obviously, the rules of bridge itself, but the well-tried adages that every player is taught – the rules of thumb that work most of the time. Knowing when to break those rules is one of the marks of an expert player.

BARRY RIGAL (New York) grew up in the UK and is a professional bridge writer and commentator. He contributes regularly to various magazines, and is the head VuGraph commentator at World and European events.



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