



*David Bird &
Taf Anthias*

**WINNING
SUIT CONTRACT
LEADS**

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331 Douglas Ave.
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M5M 1H2
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Introduction

The opponents' bidding is $1\spadesuit-3\spadesuit-4\spadesuit$, let's say, and you have to choose an opening lead from: $\spadesuit J 4 2$ $\heartsuit A 2$ $\diamonds K 9$ $\clubsuit 10 9 8 6 4 2$. How do you make your decision? Do you rely on your past experience of leading from similar hands? Even if you play several sessions of bridge a week and somehow record in your memory what happens to each opening lead, you will have nowhere near enough data to guide you to the best leads in future. Most players rely on general guidelines, such as 'Don't lead from a king', 'Don't lead a doubleton honor', 'When in doubt lead a trump', 'Lead partner's suit'. On many deals, such pieces of inherited wisdom are far from a winning strategy.

In our book *Winning Notrump Leads*, we used computer simulations to analyze the best opening leads against notrump contracts. Encouraged by the success of that book, we now offer an investigation into the best leads against a variety of suit contract auctions.

For each chosen West hand we generate 5000 deals that match the given North-South bidding. We then play the deals automatically, using computer software, and see which leads work best — at both IMPs and match-point pairs. By analyzing the results we are able to draw some conclusions on the types of lead that work best.

The results for the particular West hand above are shown as:

	Beats Contract (IMPs)	Avg. tricks (MPs)
$\spadesuit 2$	18.0%	2.69
$\heartsuit A$	30.4%	2.99
$\diamonds K$	23.8%	2.67
$\clubsuit 10$	20.8%	2.79

The $\heartsuit A$ is a clear winner at both IMPs and match-points. The $\clubsuit 10$, doubtless the choice of many players, has less chance of beating the contract than the $\diamonds K$!

By the time you come to the end of the book, you will have accumulated more knowledge about suit contract opening leads than would be possible in a lifetime spent entirely at the bridge card table. We think that some of the results will surprise you!

David Bird and Taf Anthias

Chapter 1

Leading against a one-suit auction to 4♠

We will launch the book by considering the best lead from several hands against a spade game that has been bid without mention of another suit. It makes no difference whether the opponents play 1♠–3♠ as a full-blown limit bid, or use a convention such as Bergen Raises. All that matters is the strength that they have shown between the hands and the fact that they have not advertised a threatening side suit.

By the time we reach the end of the chapter, we will have a fair idea of the types of leads that work best. Are much despised doubleton leads less awful than many players think? How likely is a trump lead to work well? Is it better on such auctions to make a passive lead from such as ♦8-7-4 or to lead aggressively from ♣K-Q-9-3? Let the investigation begin!

Which leads work well against 1♠–3♠–4♠?

We will look first at the situation where the opponents have bid spades all the way, with responder showing a limit bid. As we said above, it makes no difference whether they have used some conventional route (such as a Bergen Raise of 3♣ or 3♦) in the process.

Hand 1

The opponents bid 1♠–3♠–4♠. What would you lead from:

♠ 9 4 ♥ 9 5 ♦ A 9 7 6 2 ♣ J 7 5 4 ?

First thoughts You may have heard people say ‘Only beginners lead from a jack’. No doubt you have been warned against leading from suits headed by the ace without the king. Doubleton leads are not generally rated very favorably, so perhaps it’s a case of ‘When in doubt, lead a trump’.

We no longer have to rely on such folklore, handed down by our ancestors! Let’s run a simulation where this West hand remains fixed and we

COMPUTER ANALYSIS OF OPENING LEADS

Winning Notrump Leads was a ground-breaking and very well-received book that used the power of computers to determine which opening leads work best against a variety of auctions at notrump. Using enhanced software, the authors now turn their attention to suit contracts. They generate millions of random deals, retaining those that match the chosen auction, for example $1\spadesuit-2\spadesuit-4\spadesuit$. By playing these deals automatically against each of the 13 possible opening leads from a given hand, they are able to discover which lead is most likely to beat the contract (also the best lead at matchpoint pairs). The authors provide insightful commentary to each result, answering timeless questions such as:

- When should I lead a trump?
- When is a doubleton a good opening lead?
- Should I lead differently against a partscore?
- Should I make an aggressive or a passive lead?
- Should I lead an ace against a small slam?
- Which leads work best against a grand slam?

By using the number-crunching computer power available nowadays, there is no longer any need to rely on general opening-lead guidelines passed down by our ancestors. We think you will be surprised by many of the discoveries made during this investigation!



DAVID BIRD (top) and **TAF ANTHIAS** were contemporaries at Cambridge University, both reading mathematics. They carried out research and development on software systems for over 30 years at IBM's UK Laboratories. In the 1970s they formed a successful bridge partnership, winning a number of national events.

David is now one of the world's top bridge writers with 116 books to his name. Taf moved on to the USA, where he became a vice president of Cisco Systems. They have joined forces on this ground-breaking book.

