



Make the Defenders Lead

Often the best way to play a suit is not to play it yourself but to let the other side lead it. With A-J-x facing K-10-x you have a two-way guess – but not if the opponents lead it. If you play on a suit like Q-x-x facing J-x-x, you will need to find a helpful layout, such as the A-K in one hand for you to set up a trick. However, you are sure of a trick if the opponents lead it. Likewise, if you have an A-Q holding, you are sure of a second trick if LHO leads the suit. Of course, defenders are wise to this. They lead these suits only when you have taken away their other options.

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

You are South in 4♠.

West leads the heart jack, which you win with the ace. You cash the ace of trumps and are pleased to see all follow. If you play on diamonds yourself, you will be out of luck because West has the ten and nothing else nice happens. How do you make someone else lead the suit?

You do not give up your trump loser yet. The opponents can still lead hearts or clubs safely. First, cash your other heart winner and play three rounds of clubs (you do not mind if someone ruffs a club – it will be with the master trump). Now that you have stripped the side suits, the stage is set. You give up a trump, not caring who wins:

♠ J 9 8 5		♠ K
♥ Void		♥ Q 6
♦ J 7 4		♦ K 8 6
♣ Void		♣ J
♠ Void	N W S E	♠ 7 6 4 3
♥ 10 5 2		♥ Void
♦ A 10 5 3		♦ Q 9 2
♣ Void		♣ Void

If whoever wins the trump (here East) leads a heart or club, you ruff in one hand and discard a losing diamond from the other (a 'ruff and discard'). If instead, a diamond comes back, you can be sure of a trick in the suit.

Sometimes you need to do more than cash winners to stop your opponents from having a safe means of getting off play. This you will see on the next deal. Another feature is that you may be able to throw someone in with the suit that you want back. If you have a double finesse suit, say A-J-10 facing low cards, you can make an extra trick even if the missing honours are offside. To achieve this you strip the other suits before you take the finesse.

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

You are in 6♠ now. West leads a heart. You win and draw trumps. Again, you want to strip the hearts and clubs. Play four rounds of clubs; throw a diamond on the third round and ruff the fourth when East follows. Finally, you ruff a heart in dummy to leave this position:

♠ 8 5		♠ Void
♥ Void		♥ K Q 6
♦ 8 7 4		♦ J 6
♣ Void		♣ Void
♠ Void	N W S E	♠ Q J
♥ 10		♥ Void
♦ K 10 5 3		♦ A Q 9
♣ Void		♣ Void

You finesse the nine of diamonds (or cover the jack with the queen). West wins but has no safe exit. A heart would give a ruff and discard while a diamond goes into the tenace.

Note the normal features of a throw-in (or elimination play or endplay):

- 1 You need a suit or suits that you want the opponents to lead.
- 2 You need to play other suits either so that the opponents have run out or so that you and dummy are both void – this way, if they can play some other suit, it gives you a ruff and discard.
- 3 You give up your loser.

The normal things to look for if you want to try for a throw-in are:

- 1 Enough trumps so that you will have at least one trump left in each hand after you draw trumps.
- 2 A suit you want someone else to lead – a guess suit such as K-10-x facing Q-9-x, a frozen suit like A-10-x facing K-9-x or, if you can choose which defender leads, a tenace suit. ■



Think Before Playing to Trick One

This is a truly vital maxim for play as declarer. When dummy hits the table, you should form a plan of attack, rather than playing on autopilot. It will be worth thousands of points over the course of a season's bridge.

Consider exhibit number one:

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

South plays in 3NT and West leads his fourth-highest diamond. If declarer wins automatically and carelessly with an honour from dummy, he will go down in a cold contract. Now suppose he stops to think before playing to trick one. He will realise that the queen-jack of diamonds represents a certain entry to dummy for the long spades. Therefore he should preserve them by playing the three of diamonds from dummy and winning the first trick in hand. He should play on spades next. East can take his ace of spades whenever he likes and can return a diamond or switch. No matter what the layout, the defenders cannot make five tricks before declarer makes nine.

Observe what happens if declarer erroneously wins the first trick with the queen or jack of diamonds. He can establish the spades, as before, but the defenders can keep him out of dummy and will defeat the contract.

Here is another example of how declarer can throw away his contract at trick one through lack of planning.

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

South opened 1♥, North responded 1♠, South rebid a slightly frisky 3♥ and all passed. The opening lead was the two of clubs, dummy played the four, East the king and declarer the six. A low diamond switch went to West's queen. West now led the nine of diamonds, covered by the jack, king and ace. Declarer led the queen of clubs and overtook with dummy's ace in order to finesse the queen of hearts. West produced the king, and the defenders took another diamond trick and the ace of spades to defeat the contract.

Can you see declarer's error? He expects to lose a trump trick and so needs to dispose of a losing diamond (or his spade). He should recognise that he has no side entry to the ace of clubs. He should therefore have thrown the queen of clubs under East's king at trick one. Now he is able to finesse the ten of clubs for an extra winner in dummy on which to throw one of his losing diamonds.

In our final example, South played in a routine 3NT at rubber bridge and received the lead of the four of spades.

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

Declarer read the lead correctly as being from length. He also spotted that if he ducked the lead in dummy then he could be sure of a second spade trick. He therefore played low from dummy. Unfortunately, East won with his king of spades and had little difficulty in finding the heart switch. The defenders thus took the first five tricks.

With nine tricks on top – enough for his contract – declarer has no need to risk this at rubber bridge, Chicago or teams. He should go up with the ace of spades and play on the minors. Note that the correct play is different at matchpoint pairs. Now the prospect of overtricks if West has underled the king of spades makes the play of a low card from dummy very tempting. It is only incorrect if East holds the king of spades, West holds the ace of hearts and East finds the heart switch.

To recap, before you play from dummy, stop, look at the two hands and form a plan. This may tell you where you want to lead from at trick two – for example to take a finesse. Maybe your plan will tell you where you need a later entry (as in example one). Maybe your plan will tell you that you want to keep someone off lead. Playing to the first trick is a bit like walking across a busy road – stop and think before you do it! ■