

## LOCKDOWN SEMINAR – THURSDAY, 11 JUNE 2020

### LEADING AGAINST NO TRUMP CONTRACTS

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#### I HAVE ADDED A FEW NOTES – THE ADDITIONS ARE IN RED

Your **right-hand** opponent is in **3NT**, without any suits being mentioned in the bidding. What do you lead?

1	2	3	4	5	6
♠KQJ9 ♥xxx ♦Axxx ♣xx	♠xxx ♥Kx ♦Jxxxx ♣xxx	♠KJxxx ♥xx ♦xxxx ♣xx	♠Kxx ♥QJ10 ♦KJxx ♣AJ	♠xxx ♥KJ9x ♦KJ9x ♣xx	♠Qxxxx ♥xxx ♦Axx ♣xx

#### Active vs Passive Leads

An **Active** lead is a high-risk, high-reward lead. It is a lead that *may* be a spectacular success and defeat the contract, but if partner doesn't hold the right cards, it will probably give away a trick.

A **Passive** lead is less likely to be a spectacular success but it is also less likely to give declarer a trick that they weren't entitled to.

#### How to decide?

#### Scoring

When using IMPs scoring (most commonly at teams) then defeating the contract is worth a lot more IMPs than an overtrick will cost. Let's imagine our teammates make 3NT= on a passive lead. If we make an active lead and it doesn't work, allowing declarer to make 10 tricks, we will have lost 1 IMP on this board. However, if we defeat the contract, we will gain between 10 and 13 IMPs, depending upon the vulnerability and by how much we beat the contract. Using this very rough analysis, we can afford for the active lead to fail 10 times as often as it works and for it to still be profitable.

However, let's imagine we were playing pairs, with MP scoring, and that conceding 400 for 3NT= is a 50% score. Now, when the lead works, we score 100%, and when it fails, we score 0%. In pairs, therefore, we would need it to work more than half the time to be profitable.

While the 'maths' above was grossly over-simplified, it should hopefully demonstrate that, in general, we should be favouring active leads at teams and avoiding them at pairs.

**You can be more risky with your leads when you are playing in teams as giving the opposition an overtrick does not give away much – 1 IMP whereas, in pairs, you could give the opposition a score of 100%.**

### **Declarer's Chances**

In the scenario above, we assumed that when our active lead failed, it gave away an overtrick. However, what if declarer was only entitled to 8 tricks and that extra trick was the difference between -1 and making? Now, when our active lead works it was entirely unnecessary (just an extra undertrick) but when it fails it is a disaster! We should stay away from active leads when we think declarer is going to have a hard time making their contract. But how would we know?

The bidding is a big clue – did they jump to their game, perhaps even making a slam try along the way? If so, they probably won't struggle to just make the 9 unless partner holds exactly what we want. If they had an invitational sequence, then they probably have just the 25 points (or maybe fewer!) and are much more likely to be going off if we leave them to their own devices.

Another clue comes from our own hand – are the suits breaking well or badly? Are declarer's finesses likely to work or fail?

**If you think that declarer has a borderline game an active, risky lead could give them the contract as they could end up making 9 tricks instead of 8.**

### **How risky/passive is the lead?**

Not all active leads are as risky as others. Consider what holdings partner can have for our lead to be a success and how wrong it can go if partner doesn't have one of those holdings. Similarly, is our lead really that passive or could it be giving away the position to declarer?

**You have to be careful if leading from three smaller cards, if one of them is the 10, as a 10 could be useful at some point.**

## “The Answers”

You may have now realised that there were no correct answers for the 5 hands shown at the start. You don't know the bidding, form of scoring, vulnerability, etc. Now, let's analyse the hands, considering what lead we might make at IMPS and MP scoring, assuming that the bidding has gone 1NT – 3NT for all of them.

### Hand 1

**In Teams: KS**

**In Pairs: KS**

We have 10 points – room for partner to have some, but not many. Without thinking too much about active/passive, we have one stand-out lead – King of Spades. It can't really give away tricks (we have the touching honours), and it is going to set up one of our longest suits. The only thing that would make us think twice about leading this suit is if an opponent had bid it and, even then, we still might!

### Hand 2

**In Teams: KH**

**In Pairs: small spade**

A less impressive holding than last time. Our 'longest and strongest' would be leading from Jxxxx but it's such a poor suit that the odds of establishing it are slim. A much more interesting lead would be King of Hearts – try to hit partner's suit! This would be a very **active** lead but a few things are in our favour:

**(Leading a diamond would be risky as it is likely to give declarer an extra trick.)**

1. Stayman has not been bid so partner is likely to have 4-5 hearts and
2. We don't have many points so partner is likely to have them. These points could be in hearts and, as partner is likely to have outside entries to the suit, the suit could get established.

At IMPs/teams scoring, I would always make this lead. At pairs, it's a bit risky and I might try a small diamond hoping that it is either passive or has a chance of being a suit that we can set up anyway.

### Hand 3

**In Teams: small spade**

**In Pairs: small spade**

Our spade suit leaps out at us. However, what are the odds that we actually get this suit going? Not great as we have no outside entries, and no 10s or 9s, so declarer will often have a slow stop. Could we consider trying to hit partner's suit again, as on hand 2? The problem this time is that we don't have an honour to help out so the odds of that working have gone down too. We'd probably still make this lead because there's nothing better to do – at least when we hit partner with Ax we might beat the contract. With just KJxx spades it probably wouldn't be worth it and we could try a heart.

### Hand 4

**In Teams: QH**

**In Pairs: QH**

Our excitement at having so many points quickly dwindles when we realise that partner is probably staring at a 0 count. Leading our longest and strongest (KJxx) diamonds is almost bound to cost a trick, probably letting declarer win a cheap 10 of diamonds. We should consider the Queen of Hearts instead – a combination of passive and active – hoping that declarer ends up taking failing finesses into us in the other suits.

### Hand 5

**In Teams: small heart**

**In Pairs: spade**

**(If the contract went 1NT – 2NT – 3NT, in teams, you would lead a spade as you would not want to risk giving an extra trick.)**

It's tempting to lead a small heart here and, at IMPs scoring, we probably would. However, something to consider is that if it looks a lot like all of declarer's suits are going to break badly and you are playing pairs, or if the auction had gone 1NT – 2NT – 3NT, we might just lead a passive spade and hope declarer goes off anyway. (One of the reasons why we would think that the suits are going to break badly are that dummy does not have a 4-card major as Stayman was not bid.)

## Hand 6

In Teams: small spade

In Pairs: small spade

(In both cases, without the AD, lead a heart)

In the case of hand below, they have 5 heart tricks, the Ace of spades, the Ace of clubs and will make 1 diamond. If a spade is led, they can only make 8 tricks but, with any other lead, they make 9 tricks.

Hand 6 was a late addition to the seminar, having played it on Sunday! Against the auction 1NT – 2D – 2H – 3NT. we make the active lead of a small spade.

You would not lead a heart with the above bidding as a transfer to hearts was bid.

		WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		Pass	2♦	Pass	1NT
		Pass	3NT	Pass	2♥
		Pass		Pass	Pass
		<b>E</b> funkmaster			
		♠K93			
		♥972			
		♦Q1093			
		♣KQ7			
		<b>S</b>			
		♠J42			
		♥A10			
		♦KJ76			
		♣A953			
		<b>N</b>			
		♠A10			
		♥KQJ54			
		♦84			
		♣J1042			
		<b>W</b> agentarf			
		♠Q8765			
		♥863			
		♦A52			
		♣86			
		3NT South			
		NS: 0			
		EW: 0			
		<b>7</b>			
		<b>D</b>			

<b>Dealer: South</b>			
<b>Vulnerability: All vulnerable</b>			
	<b>North</b>		
	♠A10 ♥KQJ54 ♦84 ♣J1042		
<b>West</b>	<b>Bidding</b>		<b>East</b>
♠Q8765 ♥863 ♦A52 ♣86	<b>West</b>	<b>North</b> <b>East</b> <b>South</b>	♠K93 ♥972 ♦Q1093 ♣KQ7
	Pass	2D   Pass   2H	
	Pass	3NT   Pass   Pass	
	Pass		
	<b>South</b>		
	♠J42 ♥A10 ♦KJ76 ♣A953		

### Summary

Make **active** leads when:

- It looks like declarer is likely to make comfortably
- IMPs scoring
- The lead has a reasonable chance of success

Make **passive** leads when:

- Declarer might go off if we don't give anything away
- MP scoring
- The lead is likely not to cost your side

**On a final note** – opening leads are not an exact science and is the part of bridge that contains the most amount of guesswork. Don't worry when your opening lead doesn't work and don't assume that the one that would have worked was 'right'. Always give it thought and understand what you're trying to achieve with it. Beware of results-merchants who tell you that you should have led something just because it would have worked!

Try not to lead away from single honours, especially in pairs.

