

Trump Leads

When to Lead Trumps

I'm sure you've all heard the saying: "When in doubt, lead trumps." Perhaps the following will be helpful in removing some of the doubt so that your opening leads will be logically thought-out and you can forget you ever heard that maxim.

Most people do not lead trumps enough but then there are those who lead them far too often. A lot of misconceptions surround trump leads. Here are the times when it is most attractive to make an opening lead of a trump:

(1) When the opponents have taken a sacrifice with obviously fewer HCP than your side. Sacrifices are usually bid on distribution; if the opponents don't have much distribution, they will usually just let you play your contract for fear of going set a ton of tricks. Therefore when they do sacrifice, it is often vital to lead trumps early to cut down the opponents' ruffing potential. Remember that each time you lead a trump it takes two of theirs!

(2) When the opponents have bid three or four suits and wind up playing in one of them. If they can't reach notrumps, and they can't support each other's side suits, they usually have distributional hands that need to garner tricks by ruffs. Leading trumps in this situation is often correct.

(3) When partner has doubled the opponents' contract for penalty (or passed your takeout double.) Low-level penalty doubles usually indicate a big trump stack and it is therefore very attractive, if not mandatory, to lead a trump.

Example: RHO You LHO Partner
1♦ X Pass All pass

(4) When a passive lead is desired but leading any of the side suits is too dangerous. For example, if the auction goes:

	RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♠		Pass	3♠*	Pass
4♠		Pass	Pass	Pass

* limit raise showing 10-11 points and 4+ spades

It would probably be best to lead a spade from ♠87 ♥Q953 ♥Q1042 ♣Q63. Note that the opponents' 9-card fit makes a spade lead totally unlikely to blow a trump trick, because you know spades are splitting 2-2 for declarer. If partner has Qx and a spade is not led, declarer's percentage play will be to cash the ♠AK anyhow. If partner has Kx, he is either getting one trick or he isn't. No other trump holdings in

partner's hand are of interest. It would also be reasonable to lead a spade from this hand even if the opponents only showed an 8-card trump fit. If partner holds Qxx - bad luck.

When Not to Lead Trumps

When none of the above conditions are present, it's probably best to NOT lead a trump as it may cost your side a trump trick. Even leads from apparently safe trump holdings may prove painful. For example: Leading the Ace of trumps from the A2 was fairly disastrous on the below hand. The result was a game swing, for the trump layout was:

	Dummy	
	K1043	
You		Partner
A2		J95
	Declarer	
	Q876	

Also avoid leading a trump if your trump holding is:

(1) A singleton. Likely when you are short in trumps your partner has length. Thus a trump lead will help declarer to pick up the suit, plus it irritates your partner to have his trump honor or honors pickled! You can more likely help partner by leading from a long suit in the hopes of forcing declarer to trump thus reducing his trump length to the same length or shorter than your partner's.

(2) Something like honor third....Qxx being the best example. Here a trump lead is likely to cost a trick. Or if you lead from Jxx and partner has the queen, a trump lead most likely made your natural trump trick disappear. Or at least it makes it possible for declarer to pick up the trump suit without losing a trick in it.

Also avoid leading a trump if:

(1) The bidding sounds like the opponents have a misfit.

(2) If partner is marked with a singleton trump and you won't be able to lead another trump when next in. There is no point in leading a trump from Kxx because neither of you will be able to continue the suit.