



www.vubridge.com

This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 1 of 2. ACOL version. Updated spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 1	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 25/04/2016	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North	
♠ Q	
♥ Q53	
♦ A7653	
♣ A942	
West	East
♠ J974	♠ AKT62
♥ AKJ9	♥ 7
♦ QT9	♦ KJ84
♣ T6	♣ KQ5
South	
♠ 853	
♥ T8642	
♦ 2	
♣ J873	

This set of six deals (the first of two series on this topic) is all about *opening leads against suit contracts*.

This topic is more difficult than leading against No-trump contracts. In general, against No-trumps, you shut your eyes and lead your longest suit (all right, we exaggerate – but not by much).

Against suit contracts there is a difference, a big difference.

Firstly, you need to reflect that there is little point in leading a long suit. By the time it is set up, and the small cards are winners, declarer will simply ruff them, rendering your efforts pointless.

Secondly, you might want to make use of your trumps by ruffing things. So you might think of leading a *shortage* (a singleton or a doubleton).

There are other considerations as well, all depending on the bidding and on your holdings. We might list all the options as follows (in no particular order of merit):

Short suit leads: (aiming to get a ruff for the defenders).

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♦ 2

Bidding.

Partner Passes as dealer giving East an easy and obvious opening bid of 1♠. When West raises that invitatorily to 3♠ East has plenty to go on to game.

Play.

We are on lead with a heap of tripe; what should we do? Well, we think this one is obvious – with no hope unless we can manoeuvre some ruffs we pull out the Diamond singleton. When we hold a poor hand (and we at VuBridge think that this South collection qualifies for that description!) then a singleton lead is often a good idea. If we are going to pay our way in this partnership we need to do our fair share of the work and here the only way we are going to take any tricks is with a ruff or two.

Partner obliges us by producing the ♦A and, at trick two, he shoots us back a Diamond for us to ruff. At trick three, on lead, we need to think of what to do. We cannot know what East has to justify an advance to 4♠, so we can't deduce what North has. However, if North has no card of entry then East is going to have an easy ride.

Essentially, we are going to need North to have a black Ace. If North has the Ace of trumps then he will get on lead in due course and our lead at trick three couldn't matter less. If that were the case we could probably lead a credit card and the contract would fail. However, if North has the ♣A as his card of entry we need to lead a Club and we need to lead it now.

Note (an important point this) that North is marked with decent cards. The less we are looking at in our own hand, the more our partner figures to have. It isn't unrealistic to hope that North has two Aces. If North has rubbish to match ours, why are East-West not in a slam?

Good things happen to people who do good things, and partner does indeed have the ♣A. That takes care of trick three and trick four is a second and fatally damaging Diamond ruff. That's the first four defensive tricks in the bank,

Sequence leads: (which are both constructive and passive, in that they give nothing away).

Passive leads: (trump leads and leads from bad suits). Think of these as *Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's*.

Attacking leads: that is, leads from honours in the hope of developing tricks quickly.

Of course, if your partner has bid a suit it is usually right to lead it, especially if he has a nasty temper...

Remember: There is always an element of luck involved in that many choices of opening lead may well prove to be wrong or, at least, unsuccessful. You just have to live with that and avoid partner's accusatory stare when you make an unfortunate choice...

Hand 1: We think this deal is straightforward.

Still, why not start with an easy hand?

and it's all over for declarer.


Just for a moment, look at this hand from declarer's point of view. He sees one possible Spade loser, no Heart loser, one Diamond loser and one Club loser. Had we led anything other than our singleton, East would have made his contract (with an overtrick).



www.vubridge.com

This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 1 of 2. ACOL version. Updated spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 1	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 25/04/2016	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

North	
♠ 2	
♥ T953	
♦ QT863	
♣ 862	
West	East
♠ J874	♠ KQT96
♥ Q7	♥ KJ
♦ KJ74	♦ A95
♣ A53	♣ K74
	
South	
♠ A53	
♥ A8642	
♦ 2	
♣ QJT9	

On the last deal you had a heap of rubbish but managed to take two tricks with two ruffs. Leading a singleton worked a treat.

What's your fancy on this deal?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ Q

Bidding.

East opens 1♠ as dealer and we Pass as South. Some would overcall on the South hand but it's unwise to do so. The two-level can be a graveyard and many large penalties lie there. If the hand is a misfit we could well play in 2♥ Doubled; if the hand isn't a misfit then East-West are likely to outbid us in Spades.

After we Pass West raises to 3♠ and East bids the fourth. Now we are relieved that our silence has given nothing away to declarer.

Play.

We have to lead against 4♠. What to do, and why? In Hand 1 we had a rubbish tip and the successful lead was a singleton Diamond. In that instance we had no winners in our hand, but we knew that North had to have something useful over there. We had a chance of reaching him for a couple of ruffs.

On this hand, North is the player with the tip. We are the player with "something useful" and because of that we can deduce that North is a broken reed. In these circumstances, the lead of a singleton is unprofitable. Can North really have the ♦A? Nope, not a chance. If he doesn't have it (and no side-entry either) then we cannot gain by leading our singleton. However, we might wreck partner's holding in Diamonds by leading one, and revealing the position to declarer.

Here, as an alternative, we have one of the best leads in the game – the top of a solid sequence. This lead may set up a trick (or two) for our side but one thing's for certain – we are giving declarer nothing that he can't take for himself. Essentially we are playing a waiting game.

Look at this hand for a moment from East's point of view. He's got one Spade loser, one Heart loser, one Club loser and possibly one Diamond loser, depending on the lie of the Diamonds. His plan is to finesse the ♦J, hoping we have the ♦Q. Failing that he could use the dummy as a dump dummy, setting up the Diamonds to ditch a Club loser.

Today he is due to be unlucky but look what happens if we were to lead the singleton ♦2. Dummy would play low and the ♦10 would force the ♦A. Declarer would drive out the Ace of trumps, win the Club return, draw trumps and be in Easy Street. Why? Because he could run the ♦9, happy to see it lose. Although North would make the ♦Q, the ♦K J would be established as winners for dumping a Club.

Declarer would score four Spades, one Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs. Contract made.

However, the lead of the ♣Q gives East no chance worth mentioning. Declarer takes the Club and attempts to draw trumps. We take the first round and play another Club. Now declarer has too many losers. He knocks out the ♥A, so we cash our Club trick and wait patiently for declarer to play Diamonds. North applies the *coup de grâce* with his lovely ♦Q right at the death.

Postscript.

It is our experience here at VuBridge that players overdo *shortage leads* (singletons and doubletons). Too often a singleton or (worse) a doubleton is led with insufficient thought.

Points to be considered before leading a shortage.

1. Can we reach partner's hand?
2. Does he have anything?
3. Will he have re-entries to send us a ruff again?
4. Do we have a better lead?


Remember – ***the better your hand the worse it is to lead a singleton.***



www.vubridge.com

This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 1 of 2. ACOL version. Updated spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 1	Contract: 4H
ACOL	By: East
Date: 25/04/2016	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North		East	
♠ AT975		♠ 642	
♥ Q		♥ AKJ964	
♦ AT7		♦ 9	
♣ K852		♣ AJ9	
West		East	
♠ QJ8		♠ 642	
♥ T873		♥ AKJ964	
♦ KQJ82		♦ 9	
♣ Q		♣ AJ9	
South			
♠ K3			
♥ 52			
♦ 6543			
♣ T7643			

Which suit do you lead here?

And which card?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
P	1♠	2♥	P
3♥	P	4♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ K

Bidding.

After two Passes partner opens 1♠. East overcalls 2♥ and, after we Pass, West raises to 3♥.

Partner has nothing more to say and East chances his arm by going on to game.

Play.

4♥ it is and we have to lead.

This is easy stuff – it is written in the good book that: “*Thou shalt always lead thy partner’s suit*”. (Well, it will be when one of us here at VuBridge gets round to writing it...)

Here, we should lead the ♠K (top of a doubleton) and continue the suit to our partner’s ♠A. A third round of Spades, ruffed by our ♥2, gives us the first three tricks and later on in the day (actually, much later on in the day!) our partner comes to his ♦A.

There should be no difficulty for our partner in knowing what to do at trick three. From a holding of ♠K × × we would lead a low card (actually, the lowest Spade) so it follows logically that when we lead the ♠K without the ♠Q to back it up we can only have either a doubleton or a singleton. Thus, North knows that we will be able to ruff the third Spade.

Long, long ago it was fashionable to lead “top of partner’s suit” regardless of the length of that suit. You can still find players blindly following that rule these days. However, in more civilised circles, that style went out with the Charleston...

Postscript.

At trick three we faced a problem of what to lead – a Club or a Diamond? The point to realise here is that it cannot cost to lead a Club. If declarer has both Aces, nothing matters. If partner has one of them then it may *seem* important to lead the right suit now. It is nothing of the sort.

If partner has the ♦A it cannot run away – how could declarer rid himself of his Diamond losers? He cannot possibly discard five Diamonds from dummy on a side-suit. However, he might conceivably dump any Club losers in hand on dummy's long Diamonds. The priority, therefore, must be to lead a Club at trick four, taking care of all possibilities.

It is an important defensive point.



www.vubridge.com

This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 1 of 2. ACOL version. Updated spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 1	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 25/04/2016	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

North ♠ 9 ♥ AQ843 ♦ K83 ♣ J742		East ♠ AKQ74 ♥ 752 ♦ A9 ♣ KQT	
West ♠ J852 ♥ KJT ♦ QT54 ♣ A6		South ♠ T63 ♥ 96 ♦ J762 ♣ 9853	

What do you lead when you hold rubbish and your partner has said nothing in the auction?

Remember, your target is still to beat the contract so you have to think of where the requisite number of defensive tricks are coming from.

West	North	East	South
P	P	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 9

Bidding.

West Passes as dealer, allowing East to open 1♠. West raises to 3♠ and East thinks he is on to a good thing when he advances to game.

Play.

Once again we have to lead from tripe against a confidently bid game. Not only that, but partner is a Passed hand. How might we garner four defensive tricks out of this lot?

Well, when we hold a fistful of rubbish we have to hope that partner has some goodies so that we can take sufficient defensive tricks. Remember this – our aim is to take four tricks and our contribution to the defence is likely to be, well, minimal with this collection of bus tickets.

A short suit lead is often a good idea in these circumstances, hoping for a ruff. (Compare this deal with Hand 1). What other possibility exits on the hand? How else might we generate some winners?

Here, a Heart lead (the ♥9 – top of a doubleton) works like a charm. Partner wins the first two Hearts and gives us a ruff on the third round. In the fullness of time the defence comes to a Diamond trick and an irritated declarer fails in his contract.

Notice that North is able to recognise the lead of the ♥9 as shortage. What else can we have when North can see the ♥A K Q J 10 split between dummy and his own hand? Note that we do not lead "top of nothing" from three low cards here at VuBridge. From ♥9 6 5, for instance, we would start with the ♥6 and follow with the ♥9. This style is used to avoid confusing partner.

Now, many players overdo the lead of a worthless doubleton, employing this strategy on every day that ends in a "Y". The conditions need to be right. It is a principle worth observing that "the worse our hand is, the more attractive the lead of a shortage is". Why? Because partner figures to have the high cards that we

don't, that's why.

It's not asking the earth that partner has the ♥A K on this deal – he has to have **something**. If he has nothing, why are the opponents not in a slam? (Partner has the ♥A Q on this deal, of course, but as dummy has the ♥K that's good enough).

Postscript.

At trick four, with the contract “tight”, a Diamond lead from us is fatal for the defence. Were we to lead Diamonds on this deal we'd open up a tricky (we call them **frozen**) suit. This is the type of combination that is far better left well alone – let the opponents make the first move.


If declarer leads Diamonds first he must lose a trick in the suit, provided we defend sensibly. If, on the other hand, we were to lead it declarer may escape without losing a trick. Try it out and see: we lead the Two, dummy plays low, partner plays the ♦K, declarer smashes that with the ♦A and it's all too horrible to relate.



www.vubridge.com

This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 1 of 2. ACOL version. Updated spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 1	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 25/04/2016	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

North		East	
♠ 74		♠ KQJ82	
♥ K94		♥ A53	
♦ T8743		♦ AK	
♣ K97		♣ Q65	
West		East	
♠ AT9		♠ KQJ82	
♥ 8762		♥ A53	
♦ Q		♦ AK	
♣ JT842		♣ Q65	
South			
♠ 653			
♥ QJT			
♦ J9652			
♣ A3			

The opponents give nothing away here in the bidding.

What is your choice of lead?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♠	P
2♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ Q

This deal is placed here as a clear warning in an attempt to steer you away from a poor defence that remains, alas, all too popular.

Bidding.

Partner Passes as dealer and East opens 1♠.

West raises that to 2♠ with his hand. Well, what is his alternative? 1NT? That's grotesque.

After the gentle raise what else could East try but 4♠ with his 19 points?

Play.

We are on lead against 4♠ after an uninformative bidding sequence. What should be our choice? Well, some players (still imbued with the ideas of defence against No-trumps) might select the fourth-highest Diamond, but that principle has limited merit against a suit contract.

Some misguided players like to lead the ♣A and another Club, hoping to get a Club ruff. Well, that sort of works on this hand as partner has the ♣K and can give us a ruff but it doesn't beat 4♠. The reason is that the Clubs are now set up for two crucial discards. Although East would lose the first three tricks (two top Clubs and a Club ruff), declarer would make five Spades, a Heart, two Diamonds and two Clubs. So the tactic of leading Clubs is a clear case of "win the battle, lose the war".

Best, as usual, is to lead a sequence if we are lucky enough to have been dealt one. The ♥Q is the clear favourite lead here and, as it happens, it instantly sets up two winners in the suit. Declarer can twist and turn as he might but cannot now avoid losing two Hearts and two Clubs.

So the "point" of this hand is that the lead of an Ace from Ace and another is a desperation shot with a low rate of success. Even when it works it sometimes loses (if you see what we mean), as on this deal.

*God dealt you a sequence so you wouldn't
have a problem with your opening lead!*



www.vubridge.com

This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 1 of 2. ACOL version. Updated spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 1	Contract: 4H
ACOL	By: East
Date: 25/04/2016	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North		East	
♠ T97		♠ AQ5	
♥ 5		♥ AJ843	
♦ KJ76		♦ A42	
♣ A7532		♣ KJ	
West		South	
♠ 82		♠ KJ643	
♥ K762		♥ QT9	
♦ Q53		♦ T98	
♣ QT94		♣ 86	

Here, on this deal, you are in an everyday situation; on lead against a game contract.

What should you lead?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♥	P
2♥	P	4♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♦ T

*If you have followed the logic of the previous deal (Hand 5) you will have found the opening lead here very easy indeed. This deal illustrates again the principle of leading sequences so that you don't risk opening up **frozen** suits.*

[**Note:** A **frozen** suit is one that no side can lead without making it easy for their opponents. If you want an example, look again at the Diamonds in Hand 4].

Bidding.

East opens 1♥ as dealer and advances immediately to 4♥ after West's gentle 2♥ raise.

Play.

Against 4♥ by East, we realise that leading our long suit is likely to be pointless – even when the long Spades have been established it is of no use to anyone. In fact, on this layout of the cards a Spade lead (away from the ♠K, into the jaws of the ♠A Q tenace) concedes an instant trick.

We might think of leading the ♣8 (remembering Hand 4, perhaps) but that would be an error. On this deal we don't have nothing (if you see what we mean), so the chances of partner having the ♣A K is much reduced. Also, holding a likely trump trick in the guise of the ♥Q 10 9 we don't want – or need – a Club ruff.

The best lead is the ♦10 (top of a sequence) as it is a safe lead as well as a constructive lead. In actual fact, as it happens, it sets up two Diamond tricks immediately for the defence.

Declarer does best not to cover the ♦10 with the ♦Q but he still cannot make his game. As it happens, declarer wins the ♦A, draws one round of trumps and knocks out the ♣A. A Spade return sets up the ♠K for our side and we have a trump entry with which to gain the lead. Declarer tries to dump some losers on the Clubs but we ruff and cash enough winners to defeat the contract.

Note that on a Spade lead declarer can make **eleven** tricks; on a Club lead declarer can take

at least ten tricks.