



This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. Part 2 of 2. ACOL Version. Updated Spring 2016.

Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 2	Contract: 2C
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/06/2016	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

West ♠ 2 ♥ J962 ♦ AJ754 ♣ J93		East ♠ KJ985 ♥ A84 ♦ 2 ♣ KQT5
North ♠ 7643 ♥ Q7 ♦ KQ63 ♣ A64		
South ♠ AQT ♥ KT53 ♦ T98 ♣ 872		

This second set of six deals continues the theme of opening leads against suit contracts.

The basic idea is to select one of the following strategies. Which you choose will depend on the bidding and your own holding. There is always an element of luck here as well as many choices may well prove to be wrong. Oh well, that's life...

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

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.

Hand 1: Sometimes – as here – you can predict what dummy will have.

That's all very well, but can you take advantage of that fore-knowledge with your opening lead?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♠	P
1NT	P	2♣	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ 2

Bidding.

North Passes as dealer and East opens 1♠. We have nothing to say and West replies with the catchall response of 1NT. East rebids 2♣, offering his partner a choice of suits.

West prefers Clubs to Spades – and he shows that preference by Passing 2♣

Play.

This is a modest part-score. Still, we should not turn off our brains and just let declarer get on with it. What should we lead?

Before seeing dummy we can deduce that West is likely to have an acute Spade shortage and a few Clubs (otherwise West would surely have given preference to 2♠ rather than Passing out 2♣). So, East is probably going to play the hand by ruffing Spades in the dummy.

How can this be prevented? Simple: we should lead a trump! Trump leads can be made for two reasons – one is that it is *passive* (we wish to avoid opening up suits), the other is that we might actively prevent ruffs in the dummy.

Here, by playing three rounds of trumps, we (North-South) can prevent any Spade ruff in the dummy and can ensure that we (South) make three Spade tricks. Once dummy has been denuded of Clubs the ♠A Q 10 are sure tricks. As well as these, declarer also has to lose to the Ace of trumps and has a couple of Heart losers in the wash.

That's six losers for one down.

Postscript.

When leading trumps, incidentally, it is customary to lead the lowest card. There is no need to lead "second highest from a poor suit" or any such convention. Partner knows we have little in the suit anyway.



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Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 2	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/06/2016	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

North	
♠ 5	
♥ QJT63	
♦ Q832	
♣ JT4	
West	East
♠ KJ93	♠ AQT82
♥ 984	♥ K7
♦ KT7	♦ A95
♣ A62	♣ Q83
South	
♠ 764	
♥ A52	
♦ J64	
♣ K975	

The opponents reach a contract giving you little idea of what to lead.

Faced with a barrel full of rotten apples which one has the fewest maggots?

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

Lead: ♠ 4

Bidding.

East opens 1♠ as dealer and West raises to 3♠. East goes on to 4♠, giving us little clue about his hand type or strength.

Play.

We have no knowledge of declarer's hand (has he stretched to bid game? Is he entirely confident? Does he have shape in the form of a singleton somewhere?) and we have only a sketchy view of what dummy has.

West has shown 10 to 11 points (more or less) and four Spades. Having said that, there are a multitude of hands where West would bid 3♠ including shapely ones as well as flat ones.

We have nothing attractive to lead (no Ace-King combination, no sequence, no singleton) and the danger with these holdings of unsupported honour cards is that leading away from them may well give the opponents a trick to which they are not entitled.

With this type of hand it can be right to follow a *passive defence*, meaning that we just get off lead and make declarer do his own dirty work. We don't want to lead a Club, Diamond or Heart but we'd welcome East or West broaching the suit first. So, with little better to do with our time, we lead a trump.

Let's pause for a moment and look at the hand from East's point of view. He's got at least one, possibly two, Heart losers (he doesn't know where the ♥A is lurking), a Diamond and one or two Club losers (he doesn't know who has the ♣K). If we, as South, were to lead a Heart or a Club it would give declarer an easy trick there (a second trick in the case of Clubs).

Diamonds is an interesting suit, worthy of study. Were we to lead one of those declarer would play low from the table, taking the ♦Q with the ♦A. Subsequently, he would be able to make three tricks in the suit, picking up our ♦J by means of a finesse. It's yet another suit that would be poisonous to lead. If declarer broaches the suit first he makes just two tricks –

if we lead it he makes three. It's another example of a **frozen suit** – whoever leads Diamonds loses out by doing so.

Anyway – back to the action. Declarer takes the trump lead and draws trumps. He next tries his 50% shot in Hearts, leading up to the ♥K. Nope, *not today, José*. We take the ♥A and, still refusing to open up anything that we shouldn't, carefully play back a Heart.

Put on lead by ruffing a third Heart declarer tries his luck with a Club to the ♣A and a Club to the ♣Q. Maybe that will win...? Maybe North has the ♣K? Sorry, East. It just isn't your lucky day. We bash that with the ♣K and play another Club.

Partner wins that with the ♣J, defeating the contract. It is worth noting, though, that partner is on lead and has little choice but to lead a Diamond. In doing so declarer is able to make three Diamond tricks and escapes for one down.

Postscript.


Passive defence, beginning with a trump lead, wins the day. The aim on this hand is to avoid opening up a suit best left untouched.

Opening up virgin suits is often akin to opening a can of worms. Frequently it is best if the opponents tackle them first.



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Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 2	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/06/2016	Board #: 3
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

North	
♠ 9	
♥ T763	
♦ A9732	
♣ QT3	
West	East
♠ KQ3	♠ AJT852
♥ KQ984	♥ J
♦ K8	♦ QT5
♣ J84	♣ A62
	
South	
♠ 764	
♥ A52	
♦ J64	
♣ K975	

This hand looks to be remarkably similar to Hand 2.

The same hand on lead to the same contract. Surely the opening lead will be the same?

You might have thought so...

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

Lead: ♣ 5

You may note that your hand here is identical to Hand 2. Same hand, same contract – so the same lead, right? Wrong.

On Hand 2 East-West bid East-West bid 1♠ – 3♠ – 4♠, a sequence which gave you no real clues about what to lead. Here you know more.

Bidding.

As dealer, East opens 1♠ and West replies 2♥.

After a 2♠ rebid from East (long Spades, a minimum hand) West goes straight to the Spade game.

Play.

What do we know now? Well, East has a minimum opening bid with long Spades. West has a decent hand (at least an opening bid) but is also promising five Hearts, quite possibly decent ones.

Now, the problem with this type of hand is that those Hearts on the table are likely to be declarer's *source of tricks*. It isn't necessarily the case but it happens so often that we can take it as probable.

When declarer is threatening to set up a side-suit it is usually important to get our tricks before the rats get at them. Any losers declarer has in Clubs and Diamonds may well disappear on dummy's Hearts – and we have been warned of that danger by the bidding.

In these circumstances the watchword is **attack**. We should lead aggressively (our strongest suit – away from a King for example), and hope to get four tricks set up fast. Note that on a *passive* trump lead declarer would win in hand and lead a Heart.

We'd be stymied; we couldn't duck the ♥A (it would never make a trick were we to play small). However, taking the Ace would be equally fatal. Declarer would bin his losing Clubs on the ♥K Q and would notch up an overtrick. Ugh.

On a Diamond lead (wimpish! Why lead from a Jack?) to North's ♦A and a Club switch (second best defence) East would take the ♣A and could dump a Club on a Diamond before playing a Heart. Check and Mate.


On a low Club lead (the best shot by far) declarer can turn and twist as he might but 4♠ is booked for the scrapyard. In this scenario we have the timing to take two Clubs and two Aces before those ever-so-dangerous Hearts get established.

It's all a question of *tempo*.



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Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 2	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/06/2016	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ 3	
	♥ A842	
	♦ A743	
	♣ Q975	
West		East
♠ 642		♠ AKQJT
♥ QJ3		♥ KT75
♦ KJ9		♦ QT2
♣ A863		♣ J
	South	
	♠ 9875	
	♥ 96	
	♦ 865	
	♣ KT42	

Another day, another deal, another opening lead problem.

This time, the opponents' bidding gives you some clue as to their hands.

However, does that give you enough indication of what to lead?

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

Lead: ♣ 2

Bidding.

East opens 1♠ as dealer and West has to find a response. His choice is 2NT, in their methods this shows a balanced hand of 10 to 11 points.

East tries 3♥ – do they have a 4-4 fit there? Nope, West retreats to 3♠ and East goes on to game in Spades.

Play.

We have to find an opening lead as South against 4♠, knowing dummy has a balanced hand and that East is at least 5-4 in Spades and Hearts.

With rubbish (which is a good description of our collection!) it can sometimes be a good idea to lead a shortage (the doubleton Heart in this instance). However, there are two reasons why we shouldn't lead a Heart on this hand.

Firstly, East has bid the suit on our right – so partner is unlikely to be well at home there. Secondly, we have four trumps – it is often right to retain them as a nuisance value. Declarer will have to drain his resources to pull all of our trumps.

Best is the attacking (or aggressive) Club lead, the ♣2 for choice. The aim is to set up our suit (hoping partner has some useful Clubs with us) before declarer can get his suit (Hearts, presumably) into the game.

This attack this hits declarer where it hurts as he gets **forced** (which means he is compelled to **ruff in the long hand**). As all VuBridge readers know, ruffing in the long hand is something that is bad for declarer to do to himself; so it is good play for the defenders to make him do it

[Note: When choosing to lead from a long suit against a suit contract we follow the same rules as against No-trumps – fourth highest from a broken suit headed by an honour].

It is important to see just why the Club lead is

so devastating. East wins the ♣A on table, draws trumps (say) and knocks out the ♥A. The defenders play another Club and East's last trump goes when he ruffs it. Eventually on lead with the ♦A the defenders have Club winners.

There are possible variations in the play, it is true, but the bottom line is that declarer cannot afford to ruff Clubs in hand with his almighty trumps and the best defence is to make him do precisely that.


Postscript.

There is a surprisingly common bridge urban myth that we should never lead away from a King. *Poppycock* and *balderdash* and other long words expressing derision. There is a time and place for everything at this game.



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Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 2	Contract: 5D
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/06/2016	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ AT765	
	♥ J832	
	♦ 3	
	♣ 542	
West		East
♠ 983		♠ Q4
♥ KQT94		♥ 7
♦ K742		♦ AQJ65
♣ K		♣ AQJ73
	South	
	♠ KJ2	
	♥ A65	
	♦ T98	
	♣ T986	

An unusual deal, this one, in that the opponents play in that rare spot – five-of-a-minor.

This means that your target is just three tricks, but how are you going to go about getting them?

Quickly or by sitting back and patiently waiting for what's rightfully yours?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♦	P
1♥	P	2♣	P
3♦	P	5♦	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ 2

This deal illustrates another example of an **attacking** or an **aggressive** opening lead.

Bidding.

North Passes as dealer and East opens 1♦. West responds 1♥ and East shows his second suit with 2♣.

West's next effort is a *jump preference* call of 3♦, showing a Diamond fit and a fair hand. It isn't forcing (so East could Pass had he opened on a minimum hand) but here East has plenty to justify bidding on.

Enough, in fact, for a shot at game. East bids 5♦.

Play.

We have to find the best opening lead after both East and West have suggested decent side-suits as well as long Diamonds.

On these occasions the defenders often have to get their tricks quickly before the rats get at them. Spades (the unbid suit, note) represents the best chance of quick tricks for the defenders, so we should lead that suit. A *passive lead* (a trump? A Club?) would allow declarer the **tempo** to dump his losers.

From such a holding the best card is, naturally, the ♠2 (we lead a **low** card to indicate that we **like** the suit and would like it led back). Conversely, should we be leading from rubbish for whatever reason we'd lead a high card – lead **high** for **hate**.

Here, on this layout of the cards, a Spade lead is a killer. We have two Spade winners on the table immediately with the ♥A to come in due course. In point of fact, it would be weak play for us to try to cash the ♥A too early; best is to attempt to cash three rounds of Spades (declarer's ♠Q might be an attempt to swindle us).

If declarer has a Heart (is that a cue for a song?) then it cannot run away, so we can


afford to sit back in our chair and wait patiently.

However, the same is most certainly not true for Spades. There are too many Hearts in the dummy to be discarded on the long Clubs but one thing's for sure – the Spades losers on the table will disappear with great rapidity if we don't cash our winners early.


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Y1 VBlue #22 Opening leads against suit contracts Part 2	Contract: 6S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/06/2016	Board #: 6
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North		East	
♠ 76		♠ AKQJ842	
♥ 92		♥ A8	
♦ QT3		♦ 85	
♣ T86543		♣ A7	
West		East	
♠ T9		♠ AKQJ842	
♥ QJT753		♥ A8	
♦ AJ4		♦ 85	
♣ KQ		♣ A7	
South			
♠ 53			
♥ K64			
♦ K9762			
♣ J92			

In this last deal you are on lead against a high-level contract.

What are your tactics here?

What is the bidding telling you to do?

West	North	East	South
1♥	P	2♠	P
3♥	P	3♠	P
4♠	P	4NT	P
5♦	P	6♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♦ 6

A hand based on one from real life. Would you have found the right lead?

Bidding.

West opens 1♥ as dealer and East starts off with a game-forcing jump to 2♠.

West rebids 3♥, showing long Hearts, and East quietly repeats his Spades. West raises to 4♠ and now East tries his luck with 4NT (Blackwood).

Well, if you are asked questions you have to supply the answers. 5♦ shows one Ace and East leaps again, this time to 6♠.

Play.

Well, here we are against a slam contract (6♠). What should we lead?

The answer is that we should attack with an aggressive lead. Declarer is likely to be able to make tricks with dummy's long Heart suit, so we have to set up a trick (preferably two tricks!) quickly. There are echoes here from Hand 3.

The best prospect for the defence looks to be in Diamonds – so the opening lead should be the ♦6, hoping that North has either the ♦Q (just possible) or the ♦A (unlikely).

Bullseye! The defenders have the tempo now and East must lose two tricks – a Heart and a Diamond. Doubtless he will claim that he was unlucky to find that the ♠A K Q were worth just two tricks and that the Heart finesse was wrong.

We show due sympathy – but we don't forget to write down the score. In our column.

Postscript.

On a *passive lead* (a trump, say) declarer would be in Easy Street. He'd draw trumps and play off the ♥A and another Heart, setting up lots of tricks in the dummy. His only loser would be the

King of Hearts, the losing Diamond getting dumped on a long Heart.

A Diamond lead gives North-South the all-important *tempo*. The defenders get two tricks banked before declarer can make use of his established suit.

By the way – we do not necessarily approve of the bidding, even if the final contract was a fair one. We are just reporting facts...