




This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. SA Version

VB#22 Year 1 Opening leads (suit contracts) Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 05/10/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

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

This first set of six deals (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: D

The bidding is straightforward with the opponents reaching a perfectly normal game contract after a limit raise of 1♠ to 3♠.

We are on lead and from our collection of trash, pull out the Diamond singleton. When you hold a poor hand (and we think that South hand qualifies for that description!) then a singleton lead is often a good idea. If you are going to pay your way in this partnership you need to do your fair share of the work and here the only way you 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. Bam! At trick three, 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. What card should we lead? We could probably lead a credit card and the contract would fail. However, if North has the ♣A 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 you are looking at in your own hand, the more your partner figures to have. It isn't unrealistic to hope that North has two Aces. If North has trash to match yours, why are East-West not in a slam?

Good things happen to people who do things good, and partner indeed has the ♣A. And at trick four, North sends us another Diamond to trump. That's the first four tricks in our bank account 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).

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 honors 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?



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VB#22 Year 1 Opening leads (suit contracts) Part 1 SA
Date: 05/10/2014
Dealer: East
[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 4S
By: East
Board #: 2
Vulnerable: N / S

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

On the last deal we 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

In Hand 1 we had a heap and the successful lead was a singleton. Let's think about why... 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 a heap. 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? Not really. If he doesn't have it (and no side-entry either) then you cannot gain by leading your Diamond. However, you can wreck partner's holding in Diamonds by leading one and revealing the position to declarer.

Here, 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) 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 receive a Club loser.

Today he is due to be unlucky but look what happens if we lead the singleton ♦2. Dummy plays low and the ♦10 forces the ♦A. Declarer knocks out the ♠A, draws trumps in due course and then runs the ♦9. Although North makes the ♦Q the ♦K J are winners for dumping a Club.

On this hand, however, the lead of the top of the Club sequence gives East no chance worth mentioning. Because declarer has a Club loser and we knock out his stoppers, we are able to cash not only both our major suit aces, but an established Club. North applies the *coup de grace* with his lovely ♦Q.

So there you have it. 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 singleton. Can you reach partner's hand? Does he have anything? Will he have re-entries to send you a ruff again? Do you have a better lead?

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



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VB#22 Year 1 Opening leads (suit contracts) Part 1 SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 05/10/2014	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

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

Lead: ♠ K

East-West bid to 4♥ after North has opened 1♠ and you 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 gets round to writing it...)

Here, you should lead the ♠K (top of a doubleton) and continue the suit to your partner's ♠A. A third round of Spades, ruffed by your ♥2, gives you the first three tricks and later on in the day (possibly much later on in the day!) your partner will come to his ♦A.

There should be no difficulty for your partner in knowing what to do at trick three. From a holding of ♠K × × you would lead a low card (actually, the lowest spade) so it follows logically that when you lead the ♠K without the ♠Q to back it up you can only have either a doubleton or a singleton. Thus, North knows that you 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. That style went out with the Charleston...

North
♠ AT975
♥ Q
♦ AT7
♣ K852

West
♠ QJ8
♥ T873
♦ KQJ82
♣ Q



East
♠ 642
♥ AKJ964
♦ 9
♣ AJ9

South
♠ K3
♥ 52
♦ 6543
♣ T7643

Which suit do you lead here? And which card?



This series is about opening leads against suit contracts. SA Version

VB#22 Year 1 Opening leads (suit contracts) Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 05/10/2014	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

<p>North</p> <p>♠ 9</p> <p>♥ AQ83</p> <p>♦ K73</p> <p>♣ QT632</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ AQJ74</p> <p>♥ 752</p> <p>♦ AT8</p> <p>♣ J5</p>	
<p>West</p> <p>♠ K865</p> <p>♥ KJT4</p> <p>♦ Q96</p> <p>♣ AK</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ T32</p> <p>♥ 96</p> <p>♦ J542</p> <p>♣ 9874</p>	

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
1NT	P	3♣	P
4♠	P	P	P

Lead: H

Here you have to lead from trash against a confidently bid game, 4♠ in this instance. What to do?

Well, when you hold a fistful of garbage you have to hope that partner has some goodies so that you can take four tricks. Remember this – your aim is to take four tricks and your contribution 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). Here, a Heart lead (the ♥9 – top of a doubleton) works like a charm. Your partner (North) can win the first two Hearts and can give you a ruff on the third round. In the fullness of time the defense will come to a Diamond trick (or even two).

Notice that North should be able to recognize the lead of the ♥9 as shortage. What else can you 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 is 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 your hand is, the more attractive the lead of a shortage is*". Why? Because partner figures to have the high cards that you 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).

Note that a Diamond lead (or switch) is fatal for the defense. If you were to lead Diamonds on this deal you would 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. If you lead it declarer may

escape without losing a trick (dummy plays low, your partner plays the ♦K, declarer smashes that with the ♦A and it's all too horrible for the defense).



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VB#22 Year 1 Opening leads (suit contracts) Part 1 SA
Date: 05/10/2014
Dealer: North
[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 4S
By: East
Board #: 5
Vulnerable: N / S

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 defense that remains, alas, all too popular.


You are on lead against 4♠ after an uninformative bidding sequence. What should be your choice? Well, some players (still imbued with the ideas of defense 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 you a ruff but it doesn't beat 4♠. The reason is that the Clubs are now set up for two crucial discards. Although East loses the first three tricks (two top Clubs and a Club ruff) declarer makes five Spades, a Heart, two Diamonds and two Clubs (so the tactic of leading Clubs is a case of "win the battle, lose the war").

Best, as usual, is to lead a sequence if you are lucky enough to have been dealt one. The ♥Q is the clear favorite 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 lead 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!

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

The opponents give nothing away here in the bidding.

What is your choice of lead?



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VB#22 Year 1 Opening leads (suit contracts) Part 1 SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 05/10/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North	
♠ T97	
♥ 5	
♦ KJ76	
♣ A7532	
West	East
♠ 82	♠ AQ5
♥ K762	♥ AJ843
♦ Q53	♦ A42
♣ QT94	♣ KJ
	
South	
♠ KJ643	
♥ QT9	
♦ T98	
♣ 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. The deal illustrates again the principle of leading *sequences* so that you don't risk opening up *frozen* suits.

[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]

Against 4♥ by East, you should realize that leading your 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.

You might think of leading the ♠8 (remembering Hand 4, perhaps) but that would be an error. On this deal you 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 you 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, it sets up two Diamond tricks immediately for the defense.

Declarer does best not to cover the ♦10 with the ♦Q but he still cannot make his game. Suppose declarer wins the ♦A, draws one round of trumps and knocks out the ♠A. A Spade return sets up the ♠K for your side and you have a trump entry with which to gain the lead. Declarer can try to **dump** some losers on the Clubs but you can 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.