

OPENING LEADS

By Baloney Bill --- June 1, 2026

Opening leads are most likely the most important defensive play against opponents, and many bridge experts agree with me. But then, most bridge experts think I'm full of baloney.

Why are opening leads so important?

- Your opening lead is your first communication with partner during the play of the hand; if partner does not understand your opening lead, you aren't off to a very good start; and opening leads are more difficult than when dummy's hand is exposed.
- WHY EVEN BOTHER TALKING ABOUT THIS? Well, I often ask my right-hand opponent (RHO) what her partner's opening lead tells her, and guess what? Most of the time, RHO either has no idea or rattles off some misinformation.

Let's start with a brief recap of the leads that I believe to be the safest and most instructive to partner, and in some cases most lethal to opposing declarer. In order of preference, usually...

- Top of sequence (3+ cards), e.g. lead the Jack if you have the J 10 9, or J 10 9 8, or J 10 9 8 7...
- Lead partner's suit, if partner has competed in the auction; which card?
 - Well, never lead the ace of partner's suit or underlead the ace (unless playing against a NT contract).
 - What if you hold the Q 9 3? Lead the ____ to let partner know that you have an A, K and/or Q in her suit.
 - What if you hold the Q 8 7? _____ lead partner's suit!
 - Hey! Wait a sec! I was told to lead the biggest card in partner's suit, in this case, the Queen!!
- Lead opponents' trump suit when they readily agree on it, e.g. 1S – P – 2S – P – 4S – P – P – P
- Top of nothing, e.g. lead the 9 if your holding in that suit is 9 5 3 2;
- Bottom of something, e.g. lead the 3 if you have a high honor (e.g. A, K or Q), as noted above.
 - The two previous bullets relate to the "BOSTON" lead system (top of nothing; bottom of something).
 - If you lead a 2, 3, or 4, you possess an A, K, and/or a Q. If you lead a 7, 8, 9 or 10, that's your highest card in that suit; if you lead a 5 or a 6, use this to show that your top card in that suit is the jack (this isn't considered a BOSTON lead, but it seems to work out well for me and my partners, so consider adding it to your repertoire).
 - Another related note: If you have two touching honors, lead the higher honor, not the lower one (e.g. holding the QJ, lead THE QUEEN, not the jack. Holding the A and K, lead the ACE, not the king.). These are top of sequence leads. I like the AK example much better than the QJ example; Why? _____
- Fourth from longest and strongest. I'll let you look this up, and then hopefully you will ignore it. Too many people choose this lead, and partner has no idea how to interpret it, and even if partner interprets it correctly, it may not be nearly as helpful as any of the above leads.

OK, some practice. Please ask the best-looking (BL) person at your table to deal a hand. Assume this BL person won a 2 ♠ contract. Here was the bidding sequence: BL opened 1 ♠, followed by a pass; BL's partner bid 1NT; another pass, then BL bid 2 ♠. BL's LHO gets to lead, and chooses which card? _____

- OK, LHO put your hand down and ask the others what they think about your lead!

Repeat this practice with the same hands. Do this again (and again). But the second time you do it, assume that the smartest player (please enter name here _____) wins a 2NT contract. Do the same analysis after declarer's LHO leads.

Repeat the practice again with the nastiest player winning a 3 ♦ contract, and then finally, repeat with the most excitable player winning a 5 ♣ contract.