

LEADING AGAINST NOTRUMP



Notrump is a race! The defenders are trying to make tricks for their side while declarer tries to develop the tricks to make the contract. The defenders have an edge. They get to lead first. Choose your opening lead wisely. Remember that it doesn't matter if you win tricks early or late in the hand, only that you win as many tricks as possible. In notrump, you frequently win tricks later with little cards in long suits but you have to work to make this happen.

WHICH SUIT?

- **Partner's suit.** When partner opens or overcalls, it's usually best to lead his bid suit.
- **Your own longest suit.** If partner has not bid, work on your own long suit.
- **An unbid suit.** Listen to the bidding. It's not usually a good idea to lead a suit where the opponents have shown length and strength — lead a suit they have not bid.

WHICH CARD?

Once you choose the suit, select the correct card. The card you lead can give partner important information and help him defend.

When leading partner's suit:

- Lead TOP of a two-card or longer sequence.
- Lead TOP of a doubleton.
- Otherwise, lead LOW (*fourth best* with four or more cards in the suit).

When leading your own long suit:

- Lead TOP of a three-card or longer sequence of touching high cards.
- Otherwise, lead LOW (fourth from the top).

WHEN PARTNER LEADS

THIRD HAND HIGH — When partner leads a small card, he needs your help. Try your best to win the trick. Even when you don't expect the high card you play to actually win the trick, it will help promote partner's high cards into winners. Remember, you're in this together.

RETURN PARTNER'S LEAD — In notrump it usually works best if the defenders focus on setting up the long suit that was played on opening lead. You may have to drive out a few of declarer's high cards before that suit is good. Each time you get the lead, continue with the same suit. If you made the opening lead, keep leading your own suit; if partner made the opening lead, return partner's lead. When you lead back the suit partner led on opening lead, lead according to the rules for leading partner's suit. Lead top with any doubleton; lead top with two or more touching high cards; lead low otherwise.