



By: Don Rogers

Leading from AKxxx at a Suit Contract

It is often the case that you are on lead holding AKxxx (or AKxxxx) in your suit. The lead of the A is a natural and excellent lead (against a suit contract). But then dummy comes down and you see Qxx of your suit. Now you have a problem of what to do at trick 2. Leading your K makes the Q good, and if declarer started with a singleton then disaster – he ruffs your king and makes his queen good, which he could never do on his own. On the other hand, if partner has 2 of your suit you can lead the king, then lead a third one for partner to ruff (Yay!). How do you know what to do?

The key is to know how many of your suit partner and declarer each started with. (If you can count partner's holding, then you also know declarer's.) The key to solving this is for partner to give count, and for you to pay attention to partner's count.

Note: If you bid this suit and partner raised, you should assume that he has three (or more) in the suit.

When you lead the Ace, partner should give count by either starting a high/low (for an even number) or playing a small spot card (indicating one or three). Sometimes you may need to make deductions from the bidding and the other cards you can see to tell which it is. Of course declarer, if they are good, will attempt to fool you by concealing a card that would help you tell what partner has.

Case 1

Dummy has Qxx and partner follows to the first trick with a low spot card. Partner probably has three, and leading the K will establish the queen. Unless dummy has a long running suit for discards and you need to grab your tricks off the top, better to switch if a safe switch is available.

Case 2

Dummy has Qxxx and partner follows to the first trick with a low spot card. Partner probably has three, and declarer started with only one! Better to switch and hope partner can later lead the suit for you, which forces declarer to either ruff or concede your K.

Case 3

Dummy has Qxx and partner follows to the first trick with a high spot card. Partner probably has two, and declarer the remaining three. Now it is probably best to lead the K and another so that partner can ruff the third round and ruin the Q. However, it is possible that partner has 4, and declarer a singleton.

The bidding should allow you to tell.

This is all good when partner has a doubleton with a high and low card, or three with a low card to play. What happens when partner has two with the 4 & 3, or three cards of the 9,8,7? Sometimes you can't really tell, but sometimes you can guess by looking at the cards in your hand and the dummy. For example, if you lead the A and partner plays the 4, and you don't see the 3 or the 2, it is more likely that he is starting a high low (but no guarantees!).