

# Play of the Hand

## Opening Leads:

- Honor at the top of a sequence
  - Top of touching honors in suit contracts,
  - Should have at least 3 out of 4 cards starting with your highest card in No Trump contracts.
  - Leading an honor denies the next higher card and promises the next lower (leading the Queen denies having the King and promises having the Jack)
- Honor at the top of an interior sequence (Jack from K J 10 ...)
- Fourth best card in your longest suit (especially in No Trump contracts).
  - Usually should have an honor in the suit.
  - If two equal length suits, lead the stronger suit.
- In suit contracts, if you have 3 trumps or two with the Ace, lead a singleton or doubleton to try to get a ruff. From a doubleton lead the higher card first, then the lower: the high/low signal asks partner to continue that suit.
- Listen to the bidding:
  - If your partner has bid a suit, usually lead it.
  - Usually avoid leading suits the opponents have bid.

## Plan the play at the start:

- Count top winning tricks and count quick losers.
  - How many more tricks do you need to establish to make your contract?
  - Do you need to discard losers immediately, or can you wait?
- For each suit, think about whether you need to lose some tricks in order to establish other tricks.
- For each suit, think about whether you can take a finesse to establish an additional trick.
- Usually no need to cash top winners right away, unless opponents will be able to throw off losers on a long suit.
- Decide if you should pull trump right away:
  - Will you have trumps left in both hands after pulling trump?
  - Do you have a weak suit in which the opponents can establish tricks if you pull trump too quickly?
  - Do you need to trump losers in the hand that is short in trump before you pull trump?

## Signaling (Carding): Signal to ask partner to continue a suit or to lead a specific suit

- High cards are encouraging, low cards are discouraging (this is called attitude).
  - Do not discard cards that you think will win tricks.
  - Higher card followed by a lower card on a later trick (echo) is very encouraging for partner (so playing the 4 on one trick and then the 3 on a later trick is encouraging).
  - Lower card followed by a higher card is discouraging.
- When discarding it is usually best to signal encouragement in a suit you want partner to lead. But if you can't do this, you can signal discouragement in suits you do not want partner to lead.
- Signaling also gives information to declarer, so if you don't think partner can use the information, don't signal.
- Advanced: If partner obviously should not continue a suit (usually based on the dummy hand), then low cards ask for a switch to a lower outside suit, high cards ask for a switch to a higher outside suit. This can be a little tricky as partner may not be sure if you are signaling encouragement/discouragement or indicating what suit you are showing a preference for.

## General strategies (sometimes called rules, but are only guidelines, and should not always be used):

- Second hand low, third hand high
  - If you are the second one to play to a trick, play a low card: partner might have a high card that can win.
  - If you are the third one to play to a trick, play a high card to force the last player to win with a higher card. Very often partner has led the suit because he has an honor in it.
  - When leading, lead the top of a sequence. When following (so partner will not have to play to the trick except as the last player), if you are playing from 2 or more equal cards, play the lowest card.
- Choice of finessing or playing for a card to drop: "8 ever, 9 never"
  - If your team has 8 cards in the suit missing the Queen, it is slightly better to finesse than to play the Ace and King hoping the Queen will fall.
  - If your team has 9 cards, it is slightly better to play the Ace and King, hoping the Queen will fall.
  - There are very often other considerations that are more significant.
- Start with high cards from the short hand when establishing long suit tricks
  - This makes it easier to get to the hand with the long suit later.
- Try to keep track of how many cards have been played in important suits: As declarer, figure out how many cards opponents have at the start, and then count as they play (If you have 8 cards they have 5; after the first trick if they both follow suit they have 3 left, etc.)