



Adventures in Bridge

Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education

www.advinbridge.com

This Week in Bridge

(248) Which Suit to Attack on Defense?

©AiB

Level: 2

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When we gain the lead in the middle of defending a hand and decide that it is time to attack, often because we have recognized a danger that our tricks may disappear, then we need to be able to determine which suit to attack. That is, we must determine which suit is best to lead in the middle of the hand in order to take or develop tricks for our side. This shifting to a new suit (or continuing a suit already worked on) in order to take or develop tricks has some risk involved. Usually when we attack a suit there is a risk that we are helping the declarer. There are many layouts of a suit where the side that leads that suit first will help the other side take more tricks. Here we look at some ways to help determine which suit to attack and how to evaluate the risk in attacking these different suits.

Attacking Suits

When searching for a suit to attack, the traditional answer is to lead dummy's weakest suit, but this is not always without risk.

Example 1 – Attacking Weakness on Our Right

```
xxx
???
```

Kxx

???

This is a classic position where it is often good to lead this suit from East, with a weak dummy holding on our right. There is little risk in leading this suit in this situation. If declarer (South) has the Ace-Queen behind us then the finesse is working, whether we break the suit or declarer does. Leading this suit will not cost a trick in this case. If declarer has a weaker holding like Axx or Qxx, then we will develop or take tricks immediately without costing our side anything.



Example 2 – Attacking Weakness Our Left

```

xxx
Kxx      ???
      ???
    
```

When dummy has weakness on our left it is tempting to attack this suit, but leading this suit has more risk involved than our previous example. If we lead from Kxx from West and declarer (South) has the AQ, then we have potentially given declarer an extra trick, because the Queen will win a trick it was not entitled to. This does not mean we completely avoid this play, we just must consider that there is more risk in leading the suit from a position like this than when the weakness is on our right.

Examples 3-4 - Attacking Strength on Our Left

Example 3

```

      Kxx
QJx      ???
      ???
    
```

Example 4

```

      AQx
xxx      ???
      ???
    
```

When dummy is on our left and has strength, we often attack this suit, hoping that partner has strength behind the dummy. In Example 3, we hope that partner has the Ace. In Example 4, we hope partner has the King or even the King-Jack. Notice that this is a similar position to Example 1, where we were attacking weakness on our right, but in this case we can not see the weakness that we are hoping for in declarer's hand.

Examples 5-6 – Attacking Strength on Our Right

Example 5

```

      Axx
???      QJx
      ???
    
```

Example 6

```

      Axx
???      Kxx
      ???
    
```

When dummy is on our right and has strength then it is more dangerous to attack this suit. If dummy has a tenace like AQ, then leading into it is rarely helpful. But if dummy has only one honor, like Axx, then we are more likely to attack this suit successfully. This will be successful or not based more upon partner's and declarer's holdings. Leading this suit in Example 5 is very reasonable and will usually not cost our side a trick, unless declarer has KTx. In Example 6, it is much more dangerous to lead the suit; if declarer has the Queen, then leading the suit will be much more costly.



Examples 8-9 – Setting Up a Trick?

Example 8

AKx
JTx ???
 ???

Example 9

AKxx
JTx ???
 ???

When dummy has a strong holding and we have a 3-card holding, like JTx or QJx in that suit, then it is more attractive to attack this suit if dummy has only a 3-card suit than if dummy has a 4-card suit. (This is even more true if dummy has a strong 5-card suit, but for some reason the danger of a 4-card suit is often overlooked by many players.) Leading this suit in Example 8 is more attractive than in Example 9. This is true because in Example 9, even if we set up a 3rd round winner in this suit, we may develop a discard on the 4th round for declarer if the suit divides 3-4-3-3 around the table. This does not mean we do not ever attack this suit in Example 9, but it has a small additional risk of setting up a discard when compared with Example 8. This analysis is true whether we are attacking a strong suit on our left or on our right.

Example 10 – Leading Trump

♠ xxx
♥ x

 ♠ Ax
 ♥ KQJx

When we see dummy with shortness in a suit, there is danger that our winners in this suit get ruffed away. The way we attack dummy's ruffing power in this situation is to lead trump. In Example 10 against a ♠ contract, we play the ♠A and then another ♠ to cut down on dummy's ruffing power and protect our ♥ suit.

Examples 11-16 – More Dangerous Shifts

When we have a honor touching dummy's honor then it may be correct to attack this suit, but there are many card combinations where leading this suit can be costly.

Example 11

Axx
JTxx Kxx
 Qxx

Example 12

Axx
Kxx JTxx
 Qxx

Leading the suit in Example 11 from East can cost a trick. Alternatively, leading the suit in Example 12 from West can cost a trick.



Example 13

Kxx
Q9xx ATxx
 Jx

This is an example of a suit where whichever side leads the suit first costs their side a trick. If West leads this suit, declarer can play low and be guaranteed a winner in the suit.

Example 14

Kxx
Axxx Qxx
 Jxx

Example 15

K9x
Jxx Qxx
 ATx

As East, it is safe to lead this suit if the layout is as in Example 14. But if the suit is divided as in Example 15, then leading this suit as East can allow declarer to have no losers in this suit by finessing East out of their Queen on the second round of the suit.

Example 16

Qxx
ATxx Jxx
 Kxx

In this example, if East leads this suit then West may make the mistake of taking their Ace right away, setting up 2 tricks for declarer. Leading this suit gives partner an opportunity to make a mistake because they do not know who has the King and who has the Jack.

Examples 17-19 Extreme Danger, Take Our Ace?

Example 17

xxx
Axx Kxxx
 QJT

Example 18

Qxx
Axx KJxx
 xxx

Example 19

Kxx
Axx Qxxx
 Jxx

Leading an Ace without the King is often costly on opening lead – it is not something that we normally do. But in the middle of the defense we often lead an unsupported Ace, especially when we are concerned that it may be going away. When facing danger that our tricks may go away, leading the Ace as West is reasonable in all of the positions in Examples 17-19.



Conclusion

When there is no danger that our tricks are going to disappear then we tend to stay passive on defense and not lead a new suit. But when we see that we are facing danger then we must get active and go get any tricks to which we are entitled. In getting active, we must balance getting our tricks with the danger that we give away even more tricks trying to attack a suit. Here we have just scratched the surface of the many card combinations that you may face at the table. Learning to recognize the pros and cons of different attacking situations will help you become a much stronger defender.