



Adventures in Bridge

Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education

www.advinbridge.com

This Week in Bridge

(276) Rusinow Opening Leads

© AiB

Level: 6

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

There are a variety of opening lead treatments and agreements that can help us better communicate with partner. Traditionally, we lead the top of touching honors. Another approach, called Rusinow opening leads, is to lead our second-best card from our touching honors. Many expert partnerships prefer these opening lead agreements because they make it more difficult to read the position of an opening lead (whether it is from touching honors or honor doubleton) and they allow for the lead of an Ace, denying the King. Let's look at the details of Rusinow opening leads, so that you can decide whether to play them and be aware of how they work in case you run into an opponent that is playing them.

Rusinow Opening Leads

Here are the honor cards we lead when we agree to play Rusinow opening leads. These leads are second-best from touching honors in 4-card or longer suits.

- King from A**K**Jx
- King from A**K**xx
- Queen from K**Q**Tx
- Queen from K**Q**xx
- Jack from Q**J**Tx
- Jack from Q**J**9x
- Jack from Q**J**xx

Note – Many partnerships agree to make standard opening leads from 3-card suits and Rusinow opening leads from 4+card suits. This can be extremely helpful for working out what is going on, especially when it comes to unblocking a suit.



The Opening Lead of an Unsupported Ace

One other advantage of Rusinow opening leads occurs when we are in a cash out situation (or in other times when it just seems right), when we want to lead an Ace in a suit where we do not want to promise the King. Playing Rusinow opening leads, the lead of the Ace generally denies holding the King and partner then knows whether or not to encourage when holding only the Queen. Partner will not make the mistake of thinking that we have the AKx+ and misdefend.

Rusinow Opening Leads vs. Notrump Contracts

Many partnerships choose to play Rusinow opening leads versus notrump contracts as well as suit contracts (though this is less common). This opening lead style combines nicely with the common expert agreement of King as the power lead (King for count or unblock). In this case, we need make the following leads:

- Ace from AKxx - This Ace asks for Attitude for the Queen in NT.
- King from AKJTx – This King asks for the unblock of the Queen, otherwise to give count.
- From AKJx we can lead what we think is right. This is nice, because we do not have the ambiguity of whether the King shows the AK or KQ.

Now we have this set of agreements:

- The Queen shows the King and usually the Jack or Ten.
- The Jack shows the Queen and usually the Ten or 9.
- The Ten shows the Jack and usually the 9 or 8.
- The 9 shows the Ten and usually the 8.

Note: Some play Rusinow leads from 98xx (leading the 8), while others lead “top of nothing” from this holding.

All these leads can be made from the top of our holding as well as the top of interior sequences.

- Lead the Jack from AQJx.
- Lead the Ten from KJTx.



Rusinow Opening Lead Exceptions

Most partnerships have a set of rules for when Rusinow leads apply and when standard opening leads apply. Some of these situations, where we use standard opening leads, include the following:

- Leading from a 3-card suit (i.e. – we may agree to lead the Jack from JT_x).
- Leading partner's suit
- Leading a suit that was bid in the dummy

These are all situations where we may lead an honor from relative shortness or without having as strong of a holding as partner may expect.

Conclusion

Understanding the basics of Rusinow opening leads is important because we may encounter opponents that play these opening lead agreements even if we choose not to play them with our partner. A good way to decide about your lead agreements is to discuss with partner what opening lead and carding situations are difficult for you (and them) to workout. Work together to see if Rusinow opening leads can help you (or partner) in any of these situations.