



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(337) Opening Leads into Minimum Openers**

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Level: 2

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#### **General**

When we look to select an opening lead, the auction often provides us with valuable information to help us make a good opening lead. One of the biggest decisions we have to make is how aggressive of an opening lead to make. Should we attack by leading away from an honor, or should we be more passive and lead from a suit where we have a weak holding? One of the ways the auction helps us make this decision is by letting us know how strong of a hand the declarer has (how strong of a hand we are leading into). Of course, there are many factors to consider when we are working on the art of opening leads. Here we look at some general guidelines for how to lead when the declarer has shown a minimum opening bid.

#### **Opener Rebids 1NT and that Becomes the Final Contract**

When the Opener begins the bidding with a suit and rebids 1NT we expect them to have 2-3 cards in Responder's suit, a balanced hand, and 12-14 points. This is the minimum opening values they can have for opening the bidding.

Now let's consider their distribution. Here is what we know about their primary suit.

- If they open 1♣ and rebid 1NT, then they have a 3-5 card ♣ suit.
- If they open 1♦ and rebid 1NT, then they have a 4-5 card ♦ suit.
- If they open 1♥ and rebid 1NT, then they have a 5-card ♥ suit.

When the auction goes

1X    1Y

1NT    All Pass

We need to consider our holdings in each of the bid suits as well as both of the unbid suits before we choose our opening lead.



Since we are leading into a minimum opening hand, we tend to be more aggressive than when we lead into a stronger hand. That means that in this auction we will tend to lead a 4+card suit if we have one of the unbid suits. This is a relatively traditional situation where we make a “normal lead”.

If our 4+card suit is declarer’s long suit (opening suit) then we may choose not to lead it. This is especially true if it is ♥ or ♦. Since the ♣ opening could be a 3-card suit, we may choose to lead ♣ in this auction.

*Example 1*

1♣     1♠  
1NT    All Pass

With a 5-card ♣ suit and no 4-card holding in an unbid suit, then leading a ♣ here is often reasonable. Of course, our honor holding in the suit may affect whether we lead this suit. Underleading an Ace or leading away from a broken set of honors is more dangerous. Danger is not always a bad thing when it comes to opening leads; it means the action is likely to have a lot more risk, but it also may have a lot more potential reward.

Another opening lead in this auction is a passive lead of shortness in dummy’s suit. This is common with a hand like this:

*Example 2*

♠ 63  
♥ KJ93  
♦ KJ93  
♣ KJ8  
1♦     1♠  
1NT    All Pass

Here we expect partner to have 4-5 ♠, so leading a ♠ is likely to be a relatively safe and passive lead.

**Opener Rebids Their Suit at the 2-Level and that Becomes the Final Contract**

When declarer shows a minimum opening hand with just one suit, they often have an auction like:

1X     1Y/1NT  
2X     All Pass

In this auction, if we have a singleton in a suit (other than trump), this is usually our best lead, as we can potentially ruff away the opponent’s winners. But if we are not trying to get a ruff, then we want to find the location of the declarer’s potential losers and collect our tricks before they disappear.



Declarer has shown about 11-14 HCP, which will usually be 3-5 significant honor cards (Ace, Kings, and Queens). Often, they will have about 6 HCP in their long suit (this is the average number we expect), leaving about 7 HCP in the other suits. That means their holdings in their other suits are often not that robust. Our goal is to hopefully find where their potential losers are located. If we can find their weak 3-card side suit, then we have a chance to collect our tricks there. We tend to focus on leading one of the unbid suits, as they are more likely to hold 3 cards in that suit than in Responder's suit.

Of course, our honor holdings affect our lead choices as well. If we have touching honors, that is more attractive than leading from a single honor (in general). Leading away from a Queen or King is much better than leading a suit where we have a Jack or Ace (we don't underlead our Aces against suit contracts).

One other note: we generally do not lead trump in this auction. Declarer has a long trump suit and usually short trump in the dummy.

### **Conclusion**

When making an opening lead it is important to consider the strength of the hand we are leading into. The stronger the declarer's hand, the more dangerous leading away from an honor can be. When leading into a normal opening bid, we tend to mildly attack, leading from length and strength, unless we believe that we should attempt to be passive (for example, if we think the declarer is going to struggle to make the contract). Make sure that you do a good job of understanding how much risk you are taking when you lead away from an honor. The stronger the hand you are leading into, the more likely leading away from an honor is to cost you. A minimum opening bid is not that strong of a hand for declarer to hold, so you should not be too afraid of attacking in this situation.