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This Week in Bridge

(310) Unusual Honor Leads

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Level: 4

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General

Most partnerships play standard honor leads – top of a sequence or interior sequence - but there are a few situations where even standard honor leads can be unusual. Here we look at these situations, but we also overview some other agreements that lead to unusual honor leads. It is good to know these situations, even if you choose not to play them, so you can recognize and understand them if the opponents play these unusual methods.

Power Leads in Notrump

In notrump contracts, we need three touching or nearly touching honors in order to lead an honor card in that suit. In standard carding we lead the following:

- **AKJT** Here we lead the Ace as the power lead, asking partner to give count or unblock an honor if they hold one.
- **AKJx** Here we lead the King to ask for Attitude. “Partner, do you have the Queen (or other honor – Jack or Ace)?” In this situation, the King is an unusual lead, the second best of touching honors (not top of touching honors).
- **KQTx** Here we lead the King to ask for Attitude. “Partner, do you have the Ace or Jack?”
- **KQT9** Here we lead the Queen as the power lead – asking for the unblock of the Ace or Jack or to give count if partner holds neither of these cards.

Ace or Queen asks for Count or Unblock (Power Lead) and King asks for Attitude.

Some Unusual Power Lead Agreements

Some partnerships play their signaling agreements to honor leads differently – playing King as their power lead (asking for count or unblock) and playing the Ace/Queen asks for attitude.

King asks for Count or Unblock (Power Lead) and Ace/Queen asks for Attitude.

- **AKJT**
- **AKJx**
- **KQTx**
- **KQT9**



Note: Some partnerships even extend this agreement to suit contracts. These types of agreements are the reason that it is important to ask your opponents about their carding agreements. They may be unusual.

Coded 10's and 9's (Jack Denies)

Some partnerships choose another unusual honor lead method – coded 10's and 9's. These methods are unusual in that they are not the top of a sequence or interior sequence. From these leads we lead the following:

- KJx
- AJx (Notrump only)
- KT9x
- QT9x
- AT9x (Notrump only)

Playing coded 10's and 9's, these leads show either no honor higher ranking or two honors above (including the card just above the one that was led). In these methods the lead of the Jack denies any higher honor card – it is always a top of nothing lead. This is another example of a situation where it is important to know the methods the opponents play so we can properly interpret their honor lead.

Some partnerships choose to play these methods at times other than the opening lead, especially when they lead a new suit in the middle of the hand. It is important that all players familiarize themselves with these options when the opponents lead an honor card.

Rusinow

Another unusual honor lead method is Rusinow opening leads. These are leads where players agree to lead the second highest of touching honors, not the highest. Players that use these opening lead methods make the following leads:

- AKxx
- KQxx
- QJxx
- T9xx
- AQJx (Notrump only)
- AJTx (Notrump only)
- AT9x (Notrump only)
- KJTx
- QT9x
- AKQx
- KQJx
- QJTx



If the opponents are playing these methods we need to know, so we can properly place honors. Be sure to find out the opponents' honor lead methods.

Note: To make matters even more complex, some partnerships choose to play Rusinow opening leads from 4+card suits and "standard honor leads" from shorter suits.

Conclusion

Standard honor card leads (both on opening lead and in the middle of the hand) are something that we are used to playing and playing against. But there are many alternatives to standard methods, and these can lead to some confusion. Make sure your agreements with partner about your honor leads are clear and understood. When declaring it is also important to make sure that you understand the methods (especially the unusual ones) that your opponents play. Paying attention to these details is vital for you to be able to make use of all the information that you are entitled to and allow you to be the best declarer you can be!