



Well-known teacher and player Jerry Helms answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: Do you always lead fourth from your longest and strongest suit against a notrump contract?

—P. C., Salt Lake City, UT

DEAR P.C.: When defending, it's important to recognize that you have a goal, just like declarer. Against a notrump contract, your goal is to utilize the total resources of the partnership in a manner that gives your side the best chance of taking enough tricks to defeat the contract. That means your focus isn't on taking the first trick, the first three tricks, or the last trick. The objective is to have taken enough tricks to defeat the contract when all is said and done. Suppose you have this hand as West:

♠ J 10
♥ 7 4 3
♦ 8 5 2
♣ J 7 6 3 2

The auction goes:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1NT
PASS	2NT	PASS	3NT
PASS	PASS	PASS	

If you get tunnel vision and look only at your own hand, you might be tempted to lead the ♣3, hoping partner has something in the suit so that you can establish winners in the suit. What's the likelihood, however, of this being successful?

The opponents stopped in game after an invitational sequence. You have 2 points only, so partner is marked with nearly a full opening bid. Leading your fourth-best club has a low chance of success even if partner has one or two honors in the

suit. Should the club suit become established, you have no entry card in your hand to enjoy the winners.

Instead, try to set up some winners in partner's hand. The opponents didn't use the Stayman convention, so it's highly likely that partner has a four-card or longer spade suit. Partner has an excellent chance of having enough high cards to gain the lead if the suit can be established. Therefore, instead of your fourth-best club, I think a better choice is the ♠J, hoping to make the most of the combined assets of the partnership.

The full deal might be something like this:

♠ 8 6 3 ♥ Q 9 5 ♦ A 10 9 6 4 ♣ Q 8	N W—O—E S	♠ Q 9 7 5 2 ♥ K J 8 ♦ K 3 ♣ A 9 5	3NT
♠ J 10 ♥ 7 4 3 ♦ 8 5 2 ♣ J 7 6 3 2			
♠ A K 4 ♥ A 10 6 2 ♦ Q J 7 ♣ K 10 4			

Only a spade lead defeats the contract, even though partner has some help in the club suit.



Dear Jerry: If partner merely makes an overcall, can you break the rule about leading partner's suit?

—M. W., Dallas, TX

DEAR M.W.: There are few exceptions to leading partner's suit, especially if partner has overcalled. I tend to lead partner's suit. That way if it's wrong, it's not my fault! Suppose you have this hand as West:

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♠ 5 3
♥ K J 8 5 2
♦ 9 7 2
♣ 10 8 3

The auction goes:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♦	1♠	3NT
PASS	PASS	PASS	

I would take the hearts, stack them up and put them in my pocket! My partner's overcall is more descriptive than an opening bid, which reflects quantity only. An opening bid of 1♠ would say nothing for sure about the texture of the suit. It could be a five-card suit containing no high cards. The overcall in spades shows both quantity and quality, as partner should have a good suit with five or more cards. That's one of the reasons for an overcall: to suggest a lead.

The exceptions to leading partner's overcalled suit would be if I had a sure way of defeating the contract by leading another suit...or if I were void in partner's suit!

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