

Opening Leads

excerpt from full article

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Their Suits, Our Suits

The more cards in a particular suit one side has, the more of the honors in that suit they tend to have. **Safety in numbers!**

This means the less cards one side has in a suit, the less strength on average that side will have.

Not only are the honor tricks in favor of the longer side, but after the dust clears, it is the side with the majority which will probably emerge with the long tricks, not the minority.

Summary:

Long suits = MORE SAFE

Short suits = LESS SAFE

This theme is important in deciding which suit to lead, and which to avoid.

Would you believe the auction tells you which side “owns” which suit? It does.

On average, each person has $13/4 = 3.25$ cards in each suit. If you know an opponent has more than this average, it means that likely their side has more cards in the suit than your side.

If they open a weak two, they have 6 cards in the suit. Probably not our suit.

If they open 1 of a major, they have 5 cards in the suit. Or more! Probably not our suit.

If they respond one of a suit, they have 4 cards in the suit. Or more! Probably not our suit (but it's not as bad as it could be).

This also means we can look in our own hand:

If we *have* 6 cards in the suit, it is probably our suit.

If we *have* 5 cards in the suit, it is probably our suit.

So what all this means is that when you are guessing: don't lead their suit(s), and lead our suit(s).

From the auction, you want to label all suits as

- Their suit(s)
- Our suit(s)
- Unbid suit(s)

Their Suits

Avoid leading their suits. This is the “safety in numbers” theme. The opponents likely have more high cards in the suit than your side. Your honor card is walking into an ambush – breaking a suit that should not be touched, or just giving a free finesse. But there is also the issue that when the suit is set up finally, it won’t be you with the long winners – it will be them. You will know it is their suit if they have bid the suit, and the more cards they showed, the worse it gets. Sometimes the opponents have *implied* the suit (bidding Stayman implies a major).

Our Suits

These are the first choice, **always**, at least until further reflection. There are some indicators that would dissuade us from leading this suit (see other sections), but here is where we have the majority. Part of having the majority means having the majority of the HCP (safety in numbers). And when the suit is set up there may be winners to cash.

Unbid Suits

These are easy to identify: all the other suits. These are neutral ground. You’ll get a fair fight here, but no guarantees. Sometimes the opponents have shown a stopper (or denied one – 4th suit forcing, e.g.), and that stopper could be a full suit. They might even have a fit in the unbid suit. But often the unshown suits are our suits if they have found a fit. If they have 8 cards in one suit, we should have a fit somewhere else.

Excercises

a.

<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>Us</u>
2♥	2♠	1♥ 4♥	1♠ All Pass

What are THEIR suits? Hearts

What are OUR suits? Spades

What are the UNBID suits? Clubs and diamonds

Therefore try to lead spades, try not to lead hearts, and keep clubs and diamonds as a possible resort.

b.

<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>Us</u>
		1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

What are THEIR suits? Spades, clubs, and diamonds

What are OUR suits? None

What are the UNBID suits? Hearts

So we don't really have any good choices, but we have 3 bad ones, so by default we want to try to lead the least of evils: hearts.

c.

<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>Us</u>
		1N	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♠	Pass
3N	All Pass		

What are THEIR suits? Spades AND HEARTS (they bid Stayman, right?)

What are OUR suits? Again, none, we didn't bid.

What are the UNBID suits? The minors.

Here we would want to select a minor suit, since while we don't have a bid suit, the best chance not to give up a trick is in an unbid suit, not a suit they have shown.