

Bridge Today University  
 Opening Leads BTU 195, with the Granovetters  
 Class 1

SAMPLE First 4 pages of 9 pages
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Let's begin with a basic rule that separates the men from the boys:  
 Against suit contracts, don't lead aces (without the king).

At least, try not to. The lead of an unsupported ace against a partscore or game contract is often disastrous, yet many people do it all the time. In our book, "Murder at the Bridge Table," we reported a (fictitious) newspaper headline that reads: Bridge Player Found Dead After Leading an Ace. One of the deals used in evidence (the hand-records were pinned to his shirt) from the previous night's duplicate was this one:

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K 9 8 7
10 8 6 4
Q 10
J 7 6
  
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5 4 3           J 10
A 5           Q J 9 7 2
K 9 7 6 2     J 8 4
K Q 4         8 5 2
  
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A Q 6 2
K 3
A 5 3
A 10 9 3
  
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West	North	East	South
1D	pass	1H	1S
pass	2S	pass	4S
(all pass)			

West led the ace of hearts and the contract was made. Declarer was able to lead a diamond toward dummy and establish a discard of one of dummy's clubs. The club suit then ruffed out and declarer lost a heart, a diamond and a club.

After a more traditional lead of the club king (touching honors), declarer must lose four tricks. This hand was one of many that caused his partner to take bloody revenge after the game!

With this in mind, let's look at when we DO lead aces. . . .

Against suits: Ace from Ace-King on Opening lead

From A-K-x lead the ace; from K-Q-x lead the king.

Exceptions-Lead the king from ace-king when: (1) you hold A-K doubleton; (2) you are leading against a five-level contract or higher; or (3) you are leading partner's bid suit.

Once we have stopped leading the dreaded unsupported ace, we can use the lead of the ace to (usually) show the king.

The traditional ambiguous lead of the king from ace-king OR king-queen gives the defense a signaling headache when third hand holds the jack.

Dummy

9 5 3

You

K Q 10 7

Partner

J 8 2

Declarer

A 6 4

If you are leading from the king-queen, partner wants to encourage you to continue when he holds the jack.

Dummy

9 5 3

You

A K 10 7

Partner

J 8 2

Declarer

Q 6 4

If you are leading from the ace-king, partner wants to discourage a continuation.

Another scenario is the "Bath Coup." Suppose the contract is four spades and you lead the king of hearts as West:

Dummy

9 5 3

You

K Q 10 7

Partner

8 2

Declarer

A J 6 4

If your king lead is ambiguous, partner doesn't know whether to play the 8 or the 2. If you hold the ace-king, he wants you to continue for a ruff. But if he plays the 8 on the actual layout, declarer will duck and you will next lead into declarer's A-J.

Leading the ace from ace-king eliminates these uncomfortable situations. In the first hand above, you lead the king and partner signals encouragement. In the second situation, you lead the ace and partner makes a discouraging signal. In the third diagram, you lead the king and partner again plays the deuce to discourage.

There are three exceptions to the lead of the ace from ace-king. If you hold the ace-king doubleton, you lead the king and next the ace. Partner will understand that this is a doubleton, since you have led in reverse order. When you led the king, he gave attitude, assuming you held the king-queen. But when he sees the ace next, he should give you a suit-preference signal, indicating where his entry lies:

9 5 3  
 K Q 4 3  
 K J 7 2  
 10 6

A K	10 8 4 2
10 8	5 2
9 6 4 3	A 10 8
9 8 5 4 2	Q J 7 3

Q J 7 6  
 A J 9 7 6  
 Q 5  
 A K

Against four hearts, you lead the king of spades and partner denies the jack by signaling with the 2. When you next play the ace of spades, partner realizes that you are leading from the ace-king doubleton and gives you a suit-preference signal, the TEN of spades, for the higher-ranking suit. This indicates a diamond entry. You shift to a diamond and partner returns a spade for you to ruff, setting the contract by one trick.

There are three other situations where the lead of an ace does not promise the king, and these are the situations where you might lead an unsupported ace against a suit contract:

a) against a five-level contract or higher; b) when you hold an unsupported ace in partner's bid suit; c) your ace is a singleton.

Against a high-level contract it is often important to cash the first tricks, setting the contract. If you don't cash the tricks on opening lead, you may lose them: