

Lead Directing Doubles

The recommendations in this lesson are considered part of “STANDARD BRIDGE.”

PART I: DOUBLES OF ARTIFICIAL BIDS

In general, **a double of an artificial bid asks partner to lead that suit.** The more artificial bids your opponents use, the more frequently opportunities to help partner with the lead will arise. BE ALERT so you don't miss these chances.

Some common examples are:

A) 1NT	P	2♣ (Stayman)	<u>X</u> (asks for a club lead)
B) 2NT	P	3♦ (Jacoby transfer)	<u>X</u> (asks for a diamond lead)
C) 1♠	P	3♠	P
4NT	P	5♥ (Two Aces)	<u>X</u> (asks for a heart lead)

The definition of the above doubles is unambiguous. Lead Directing Doubles in these situations are part of standard bridge, not a special partnership agreement).

What kind of suit quality do you need to make a lead-directing double?

Quick answer – “It depends.” There are no precise requirements for suit quality. Whether or not to make a lead directing double is often a judgment call, on which experts may disagree.

Since you are virtually insisting that partner lead the suit you double, you need to be fairly certain that this is the best lead for the defense. The desirable length and strength in the suit doubled may depend on what final contract you expect the opponents to reach. If 3NT is still in the picture for them, as it would be in (A) and (B) above, I recommend you have at least a good five-card suit for the lead-directing double.

For example, consider the following two possible hands in the auction

1NT P 2♣ ?

1) ♠32 This first hand makes for a fine lead-directing double of Stayman.

♥432
♦432
♣AQJT3

2) ♠J3 With this hand you should NOT double. While you would want a club lead if the opponents were to end up in 4♠, you don't especially want one against 3NT. And you can't tell at this point where they will wind up.

♥J9762
♦8432
♣AK

Another factor, especially against very strong opposition, is that **they might redouble 2♣ and play it there.** If there is a chance the opponents might choose to play in the bid you are doubling for the lead, you must expect to defeat the contract to double.

If the opponents seem to be headed for slam, and have clearly agreed on a suit, you can feel free to make lead directing doubles with holdings such as AK doubleton, or even less, in a side suit. For example, let's revisit the hand from the previous page with which I said you should not double Stayman:

This time the auction proceeds:

1♠	P	3♠	P
4NT	P	5♣	?
		♠J3	
		♥J9762	
		♦8432	
		♣AK	

While it would have been inadvisable to double a Stayman 2♣ bid with this hand, it is absolutely clear to make a lead-directing double of the 5♣ Blackwood response. The opponents are clearly heading for a spade contract (5♠ or 6♠), and you very much want partner to lead a club.

In the above situation, with the ♣Ax, instead of Ace-King, you would have a judgement call, in which some experts would double, and some would not. With ♣Kx, most would NOT double a Blackwood response, but would double a control-bid in clubs, since that would indicate the Ace will be on the doubler's right.

Double of a cuebid, after partner overcalls

If your partner overcalls, and your RHO cuebids partner's suit, a double by you is lead-directing. In this type of situation, you simply need any one of the high honors (A, K, or Q) to justify telling partner it is okay to lead her suit. For example:

		<u>Partner</u>			<u>You</u>	
1♥	-	1♠	-	2♠	-	<u>X</u>

You might hold:	♠K2
	♥432
	♦J762
	♣9643

In the modern bidding style, their 2♠ cuebid shows a limit raise or better in support of hearts. Your double is lead-directing (follows the general principle of doubling an artificial bid), and lets partner know it is okay to lead away from a holding such as AQxxx in spades.

Other doubles of artificial bids

There are many auctions in which one might double an artificial bid - this paper offers only a few examples – and those doubles are usually lead-directing.

There are, however, some auctions where advanced players would not treat a double of an artificial bid as lead-directing (e.g., a double of a Michaels Q-bid), but would treat it as “value-showing”. These exceptions would generally occur when partner opened the bidding, and are outside of the scope of today's lesson.

Note that there may be a **negative inference available, when partner fails to double an artificial bid.** For example, you are West, on lead after the following auction:

	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
♠432	1♦	P	2♣	P
♥432	2♦	P	4♦	P
♦J54	4NT	P	5♥	P
♣Q432	6♦	P	P	P

Both majors are “unbid” and your holdings are equally worthless. How do all those passes from partner help you decide which major to lead? The answer lies in the fact that partner did NOT make a lead-directing double of 5♥ when he had the chance. Therefore, with nothing else to go on, you should lead spades, the other unbid suit.

PART II: LEAD-DIRECTING DOUBLES OF THE FINAL CONTRACT

In certain situations, a double of the final contract asks for an unusual opening lead from partner.

This sort of double CANNOT be made simply because you want a particular lead. **Since you are doubling the contract the opponents are about to play in (as opposed to an artificial bid in the middle of their auction) you must believe that the right lead will set their contract (or at least greatly increase your chances).**

Lightner Slam Doubles

When the opponents reach slam *voluntarily* (as opposed to a *sacrifice* against your contract), a **double by the hand not on lead asks partner for an unusual lead.** While there is no strict rule about what *to* lead, there are some strict rules about what not to lead in this situation. When partner makes a Lightner Double:

- 1- DO NOT lead a suit bid by your partner (since doing so would be “normal”, this can’t be the unusual lead partner is looking for).
- 2- DO NOT lead trump.
- 3- DO NOT lead the unbid suit if the opponents have bid three suits.

What is usually happening is that partner is ruffing something, and it is leader’s job to figure out what. Most often it will make sense to lead your longest side-suit, but you do have to listen to the bidding for other clues. For example, you are West, on lead with the following:

	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
♠J76432			3♣	3♥
♥2	P	4NT	P	5♥
♦JT9	P	6♥	<u>X</u>	P
♣842	P	P		

Partner’s double is asking for an unusual lead, and probably means she is ruffing something. What will it be? Think about it before turning the page.

DO NOT lead a club. That is the suit partner opened, and would therefore be your “normal” lead. If partner is ruffing something, looking at your hand it is far more likely to be a spade than a diamond, so your lead should be a spade. Partner’s hand might be:

♠ void
♥ 54
♦ 7632
♣ AJT9753

Partner will ruff the spade lead, and, unless an opponent is void, will cash the ♣A to defeat the doubled slam.

It is possible there will be a time when partner doesn’t care what you lead, and doubles simply because she is sure she can beat their contract (one of those unlucky slams missing the A-K of trump, perhaps?). But you must make the assumption partner wants an unusual lead.

When partner wants you to make the “normal” lead (e.g., her suit), she must refrain from doubling, even if confident she will set the contract on the normal lead. Using the double to defeat a slam you wouldn’t have otherwise defeated is deemed to be far more important than gaining an extra 50 or 100 points. Thus, the Lightner Double is considered part of STANDARD BRIDGE.

Doubles of NoTrump Contracts (usually, but not always, 3NT)

When you double the opponents’ NT contract, and partner is on lead, it is indicative of a desire for a specific, though not necessarily unusual, lead. The rules most players consider “standard” are:

- 1) If the doubler has bid a suit: The double of the final NT contract screams “LEAD MY SUIT.” In this case the doubler is not asking for an unusual lead, as one would usually lead partner’s bid suit anyway. But when you KNOW you can set the contract if partner simply leads your suit, it’s good to have a way to make sure that partner doesn’t choose this time to lead something else (which can sometimes be best – it’s not 100% to lead partner’s suit vs. NT). You also want to increase the penalty when they go down.
- 2) If the doubler’s side has not bid: The double of the final NT contract asks for the lead of **dummy’s first bid suit**.
- 3) If nobody has bid any suits (e.g., 1N-P-3N-~~X~~): The double says “find my suit”. The opening leader is expected to lead her weaker major. A typical hand for this double would be KQJTx of a major + a side Ace.

Lead-directing doubles of the final contract, as discussed in the second section of this paper, come up infrequently. I teach them to you primarily to avoid gaps in my students’ knowledge of “standard bridge”. Concentrate most on mastering the first section, “lead-directing doubles of artificial bids,” which will come up far more often.

If you’d like to read more about this subject, most books on conventions probably have a section on it. I recommend Modern Bridge Conventions, by William Root & Richard Pavlicek as an excellent reference book to have on hand.

Lead Directing Double Practice Deals

Board 1 ♠ A J 3 2
 North Deals ♥ K 6 5
 None Vul ♦ Q J 10 9
 ♣ 5 4

♠ 10 9 8 7 6	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ 4	
♥ J 9 8		♥ Q 10 7 3	
♦ K 4		♦ 8 5 2	
♣ 10 7 2		♣ A Q J 9 3	

	♠ K Q 5		
	♥ A 4 2		
	♦ A 7 6 3		
	♣ K 8 6		

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1 N
Pass	2 ♣	Dbl	2 ♦
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 N
All pass			
			3 NT BY SOUTH

East doubles Stayman, an artificial bid, to ask for a club. When S denies a major with 2♦, a sophisticated bid for N is to bid 3♣ to ask for a stopper. 3♣ is a cuebid, since East's double promised clubs.

West leads the ♣2, and E must play the ♣J (♣Q works too, but would deceive partner, since **third hand is expected to play lower of equals**). Whether declarer wins this trick, or ducks and wins the next club, the contract will be defeated. Declarer must eventually try a diamond finesse, and when that loses, the defense takes a total of four clubs tricks and the ♦K.

Note that playing the ♣Ace on the first club would be a costly error on East's part, as South could now hold up until the third round, depriving West of a club to return later.

Board 2 ♠ 4
 East Deals ♥ J 7 6 5 2
 N-S Vul ♦ Q J 10 7
 ♣ 8 6 3

♠ K Q 9 8 7 5	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A J 10 3	
♥ A 9		♥ 10 8	
♦ A 8 6		♦ K 2	
♣ 7 5		♣ A Q J 10 9	

	♠ 6 2		
	♥ K Q 4 3		
	♦ 9 5 4 3		
	♣ K 4 2		

West	North	East	South
		1 ♣	Pass
1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♥	Dbl
6 ♠	All pass		
6 ♠ BY WEST			

South's *lead directing double* of 5♥ makes a defeat of 6♠ possible. If declarer simply takes a club finesse, as most probably will, S will win and cash a heart.

A better try by declarer is to draw trump, strip the diamonds (by playing ♦K, ♦A, then ruffing one in dummy), and attempt to endplay South by leading a heart from dummy. If S wins this, they will be forced to lead a club into dummy, or give declarer a ruff and sluff.

To defeat the contract, S would need to realize that he is getting endplayed, and duck the heart, hoping partner has the ♥J. Now N can lead clubs through dummy, defeating the slam. Not easy!

On the "normal" ♦Q lead (if no lead directing double) declarer would have no trouble, taking a losing club finesse, and then discarding the heart loser on dummy's clubs.

Board 3

South Deals ♠ A J 10
 E-W Vul ♥ 5 4
 ♦ 7 6 5
 ♣ K J 9 8 5

♠ 7 6 2 ♠ K 9 8 5 4
 ♥ A Q J 10 8 ♥ 9
 ♦ 3 2 ♦ 10 9 8 4
 ♣ A 6 3 ♣ 7 4 2

 ♠ Q 3
 ♥ K 7 6 3 2
 ♦ A K Q J
 ♣ Q 10

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♥
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 N
Pass	3 N	Pass	Pass
Dbl	All pass		
3 NT × BY NORTH			

West's double of the final Notrump contract asks for the lead of dummy's first bid suit.

W expects to defeat the contract on a heart lead, by taking four heart tricks and the ♣A. While there are no guarantees, there is a good enough chance that the heart lead will set the contract to take the risk of their making a doubled contract. E could never figure out to lead a heart without the double.

West's plan should work, as long as partner understands the double and cooperates by leading a heart. When the ♥9 is led, and declarer plays low from dummy, W must overtake. Now continue hearts until declarer wins the ♥K.

North needs club tricks to make 3 NT, so must knock out the ♣A, at which point W cashes the remaining hearts for down one. There is no point in declarer risking down 2 by taking the spade finesse, since even if it works there will be only 8 tricks before letting the defense in with a club.

Board 4

West Deals ♠ 5 4 3
 Both Vul ♥ A K J 9 8 6
 ♦ 7 6 3 2
 ♣ —

♠ A 10 8 6 ♠ K Q J 9 2
 ♥ Q 5 4 2 ♥ 7
 ♦ A Q ♦ K 10 9 4
 ♣ J 9 8 ♣ A K Q

 ♠ 7
 ♥ 10 3
 ♦ J 8 5
 ♣ 10 7 6 5 4 3 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	2 ♥	2 ♠	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♥	Pass	6 ♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	Pass
Pass			
6 ♠ × BY EAST			

North's double of the final contract is a Lightner double, asking for an unusual lead. South must NOT lead hearts, as that would have been the normal lead without the double. South's club length makes it likely that partner has a void in that suit, so the killing club lead *should* be found. Partner ruffs, and cashes a heart trick.

Remember that a double of a voluntarily bid suit slam asks for an unusual lead. While the best lead is often dummy's first bid suit, this is not necessarily what the doubler is asking for (as it would be vs. NT). This double of a suit slam nearly always indicates a void somewhere, and it is up to partner to figure out which suit to give the doubler a ruff in.