

Drop Leads vs. Notrump

by Bruce Luttrell

The LEADS Box

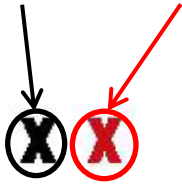
On a blank Convention Card the **LEADS** box indicates the “standard” lead with a bold-face, black, highlight.

LEADS (circle card led, if not in bold)

versus Suits		versus Notrump	
x x	x x x x	x x	x x x x
x x x	x x x x x	x x x	x x x x x
A K x	T 9 x	A K J x	A Q J x
K Q x	K J T x	A J T 9	A T 9 x
Q J x	K T 9 x	K Q J x	K Q T 9
J T 9	Q T 9 x	Q J T x	Q T 9 x
K Q T 9		J T 9 x	T 9 x x

The bold x for high from a doubleton is the standard lead, and the red x is non-standard:

Standard **Non-Standard**



The bold x for the fourth highest indicates the standard lead from a long suit.

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x x x x
x x x x x
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The length lead agreement is reinforced by partnership agreement. In your partnership you may prefer third-and-fifth leads, or some other non-standard treatment. If you choose the standard lead agreement you check the “4th Best” boxes in the “**LENGTH LEADS**” section:

LENGTH LEADS:

4th Best vs SUITS vs NT

3rd/5th Best vs SUITS vs NT

Attitude vs NT

The rest of the **LEADS** box indicates the standard lead from honor sequences. For example, when leading from an interior sequence such as KT9x, the standard lead is the ten:

K T 9 x

Leading from KQ109

The **LEADS** box indicates a different standard lead depending on whether the contract is a trump Suit or Notrump.

versus Suits

K Q T 9

versus Notrump

K Q T 9

Why the King versus a Suit contract and the Queen versus Notrump? Let's look at couple examples and try to make some sense out of it.

Leading the King from KQ109 versus a Suit contract

Suppose the contract is 4♥ and you are on lead. You have ♦KQ109 and it is quite normal for you to lead a diamond. The **LEADS** box indicates that you should lead the King. The dummy comes down and this is what you see:

South	North
1NT	2♣
2♥	4♥

North
♦843

West
♦KQ109

Your ♦K wins the first trick. You would like to know whether the defense can cash a second diamond trick. You can win a second diamond trick if your partner has the ♦A or the ♦J. What did your partner play on the first trick? Partner's play should give you a reasonable indication as to whether she likes your lead.

Suppose you and your partner have a **DEFENSIVE CARDING** agreement which is “Standard.”

DEFENSIVE CARDING
 vs SUITS vs NT
 Standard:

Suppose that you have also agreed that the primary signal to partner’s leads is “Attitude.”

Primary signal to partner's leads
 Attitude Count Suit preference

The card that your partner plays will indicate whether she likes your **♦K** lead.

	Partner’s diamonds	Partner plays
1	A72	7
2	J72	7
3	52	2
4	A2	A

Cases 1 and 2: Partner indicates that she likes the lead by playing the **♦7**.

Case 3: Partner indicates that she does not like the lead by playing the **♦2**.

Case 4: Partner knows that you have the **♦Q**, so she overtakes with the **♦A** and continues the suit. If you cannot win the third diamond trick yourself she will ruff it.

Leading the Queen from KQ109 versus a Notrump contract

When you are defending a Notrump contract, your primary goal is the establishment of defensive tricks. If you have the KQ109 you want to know if you can successfully continue leading the suit after holding the King.

South North
 1NT 3NT

Opening lead: **♠Q**

North
 ♠643
 ♥KQ3
 ♦A109
 ♣J1095

West
 ♠KQ1095
 ♥J109
 ♦32
 ♣A76

At trick 1 your partner follows suit with the ♠2. You are not sure what to do next. Suppose you decide, reasonably enough, “I hope that partner has either the ♠J or the ♠A. If that is the case then I can continue spades and cash my remaining winners when I regain the lead with the ♣A.

At trick 2 you lead the ♠10 and declarer wins the ♠J. Declarer plays on clubs and makes the contract. This is the layout:

North	
♠643	
♥KQ3	
♦A108	
♣J1095	
West	East
♠KQ1095	♠82
♥J104	♥A985
♦32	♦J974
♣A76	♣843
South	
♠AJ7	
♥762	
♦KQ76	
♣KQ2	

After the hand is over East says, “Why did you continue spades after I played the ♠2? If you had switched to a heart I would have fed you a spade and we would have set the contract two tricks! If you lead a diamond or a club we still set the contract!

Chagrined, you later pick up the same hand and lead the ♠Q. Again, partner follows suit with the ♠2.

North
♠643
♥KQ3
♦A109
♣J1095
West
♠KQ1095
♥J109
♦32
♣A76

By golly, you have learned your lesson! You switch to the ♥J. Disaster!

North	
♠643	
♥KQ3	
♦A108	
♣J1095	
West	East
♠KQ1095	♠J2
♥J104	♥985
♦32	♦J974
♣A76	♣Q43
South	
♠A87	
♥A762	
♦KQ76	
♣K82	

Declarer wins the ♥K in dummy and runs the ♣J, taking 11 tricks!

Ever the result merchant, East says, “With spades that good you should continue the suit and develop your winners! Just lead the ♠Q at trick 2. Declarer has only 8 top tricks.

You are scratching your head. Both times you led the ♠Q and partner followed with the ♠2. The first time you needed to switch to another suit. The second time you needed to continue with the ♠Q. How can you possibly know what is right?

Leading the Queen against Notrump asks partner to drop the Jack

Normally when you lead a Queen you also have the Jack:

Q J T x

Yet here you are leading the Queen without the Jack:

K Q T 9

If you lead the Queen and partner has the Jack, what will partner think? She will think, “This is odd that partner has led the Queen and I have the Jack! My partner must have KQ109! If I play the Jack, partner will continue the suit and establish her winners!”

Look what happens on the two example hands:

West	East
♠KQ1095	♠82
♥J104	♥A985
♦32	♦J974
♣A76	♣843

West leads the ♠Q and East follows with the ♠2. West knows that East does not have the ♠J and therefore declarer started with ♠AJ7. West switches to another suit, and when East gains the lead with the ♥A she leads the ♠8, defeating the contract.

West	East
♠KQ1095	♠J2
♥J104	♥985
♦32	♦J974
♣A76	♣Q43

West leads the ♠Q and East drops the ♠J. West continues with a high spade. West regains the lead with the ♣A and wins the remaining spade tricks, setting 3NT.

Drop Leads
Lesson Hands

N Deals None Vul	♠ 5 ♥ 1085 ♦ A1098 ♣ KQ1096	1
♠ AQ3 ♥ AK ♦ KJ642 ♣ A82		♠ KJ108 ♥ Q976 ♦ 753 ♣ 74
	♠ 97642 ♥ J432 ♦ Q ♣ J53	

<p>E Deals N-S Vul</p>	<p>♠ A93 ♥ K875 ♦ 7 ♣ K10942</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>♠ 52 ♥ 643 ♦ AKJ104 ♣ 865</p>		<p>♠ J1087 ♥ 1092 ♦ Q52 ♣ QJ3</p>
	<p>♠ KQ64 ♥ AQJ ♦ 9863 ♣ A7</p>	

<p>S Deals E-W Vul</p>	<p>♠ AK7 ♥ J85 ♦ KQ98 ♣ K105</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>♠ J9854 ♥ A6 ♦ J65 ♣ Q92</p>		<p>♠ 32 ♥ KQ10742 ♦ 743 ♣ J4</p>
	<p>♠ Q104 ♥ 93 ♦ A102 ♣ A8763</p>	

<p>W Deals Both Vul</p>	<p>♠ KQ1098 ♥ A6 ♦ 743 ♣ 643</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>♠ AJ2 ♥ Q32 ♦ K8 ♣ KQJ102</p>		<p>♠ 543 ♥ KJ4 ♦ AQ106 ♣ 982</p>
	<p>♠ 76 ♥ 109875 ♦ J952 ♣ A5</p>	