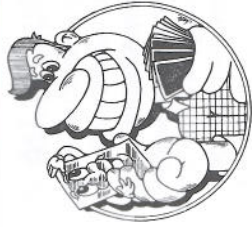


# "THE AWARD FOR BEST OPENING LEAD DOESN'T GO TO . . ."

By Paul Thurston



During a recent lesson session at our club, the Bridge Centre of Niagara, one of the attendees commented that she thought it a very common occurrence for the opening leader to lead something other than the suit her partner had bid so didn't that make it a "good thing" ?

Just as the thousands of those furry little creatures known as lemmings think it's a good plan to take a suicidal plunge over the Cliffs of Dover into the English Channel, perhaps it is a good idea to not lead partner's suit – just not usually very good for the leader's side!

In the absence of any really compelling contraindication, experienced (and successful) players tend to virtually always put their faith in an opening lead in the suit their partner has bid.

Compelling reasons not to do so do not include:

❖ "They bid *notrump* over my partner's suit – they must have it stopped so why bother leading it?"

THE POINT: Not leading partner's suit won't change the fact they have it stopped but may very well do something about setting up secondary and/or length tricks in the suit once the opponents' stopper(s) have been driven out.

❖ "Partner bid clubs, maybe he's got a short club."

THE POINT: Maybe so but surely bidding a suit doesn't deny the possibility of having useful strength and/or length in it. Even in systems where opening one club on two or three cards in the suit is allowed, statistics reveal that such openers will have four-plus clubs on average.

❖ "My hand is so useless I thought I'd lead something other than partner's suit hoping for something good to happen."

THE POINT: This is Gold Rush mentality – things look so bleak maybe I'll trudge up the Chilcoat Pass in the dead of winter and strike it rich. History tells us that far more perished than struck it rich and zoology notes that lemmings are not very good swimmers.

Yes, there are some circumstances when you might detour from the paths of righteousness and not lead partner's suit – we'll even look at some of those ideas when next we get together. In the meantime, try always leading what your partner has bid and I'll make you three promises:

1. Your defensive results will improve.
2. You will expend fewer brain cells trying to conjure up magic opening leads and have more left for getting the defense right after trick one.
3. Your partner(s) will at the very least be impressed that you've paid enough attention to the auction to know what they've bid.

### famous quotations:

Years ago there were only two acceptable reasons for not leading partner's suit: (1) having no cards in the suit; (2) sudden death. ... Alfred Sheinwold

In addition you won't endure the miserable results occasioned by unfortunate leads on deals like:

♠ J9632  
♥ Q754  
♦ 92  
♣ 43

♠ Q75  
♥ K3  
♦ KJ1053  
♣ 1082

♠ A  
♥ J1092  
♦ 874  
♣ AQJ96

♠ K1084  
♥ A86  
♦ AQ6  
♣ K75

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	1♣	1NT
		All Pass	

Opening lead: ♠3 "Partner might not really have clubs and South has them stopped anyway so what good will it do to lead them?" Leading partner's opening bid suit here would have set up the suit for partner while he still has a spade entry and before declarer has nine tricks. (It's also not a good idea to lead your long suit if you don't have entries ... ed )

Or like this:

♠ 95  
♥ 74  
♦ J67632  
♣ 972

♠ AJ83  
♥ KJ62  
♦ 105  
♣ K85

♠ K1064  
♥ 103  
♦ AK9  
♣ QJ103

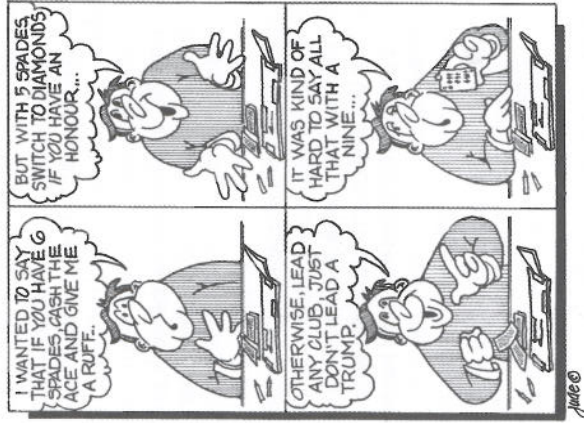
♠ Q72  
♥ AQ985  
♦ Q4  
♣ A64

West	North	East	South
Pass	3♥	1♣	1♥
All Pass		Pass	4♥

South accepted North's invitation and against the game that looks doomed with the loss of one spade, two diamonds and a club, West led . . . the ♠9. "My hand looks hopeless. Maybe I can find partner with really good spades and get a ruff to contribute to the defense." Maybe not!

South won the ace, drew two rounds of trumps ending in dummy and led a second spade towards the closed hand (knowing full well East had the ten after West's revealing lead) to set up an extra (and otherwise unobtainable) spade trick on which he discarded a club.

And so, until next time, beware the cold and deep waters of not leading your partner's suit; not to mention the chilly post mortem comments like "Should I have bid hearts to get you to lead a club?"



**TIPS FROM EDDIE KANTAR: #29.** If partner leads a low card in one suit, gets in and shifts to a low card (showing strength) in another suit, partner wants a return in the second suit. If partner shifts to a high card in the second suit (top of nothing perhaps), he is asking for a return in the first suit. Eddie offers 52 Tips on the ACBL's Celebrity Lesson webpage: [www.acbl.org/teachers/celebritylessons.html](http://www.acbl.org/teachers/celebritylessons.html)