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It's Just MayHem

with Bergen

Trump leads

I'm sure you've all heard the saying, "When in doubt, lead trumps." Perhaps the following will be helpful in removing some of the doubt so that your opening leads will be logically thought-out, and you can forget you ever heard that maxim.

When to lead trumps

Most people do not lead trumps enough, but then there are those who lead them far too often. A lot of misconceptions surround trump leads. Here are the times when it is most attractive to make an opening lead of a trump:

1. When the opponents have taken a sacrifice with obviously fewer high-card points than your side. Sacrifices are usually bid on distribution. If the opponents don't have much distribution, they will usually just let you play your contract for fear of going set too many. Therefore, when they do sacrifice, it is often vital to lead trumps early to cut down the opponents' ruffing potential. Remember that each time you lead a trump, it takes two of theirs!

2. When an opponent has shown a two-suiter, and his partner has taken a preference.

Example:

You	RHO	Partner	LHO
1NT	2♥	Pass	2♠
All Pass			

2♥ showed the majors as with DONT or HELLO. The opponent who bid 2♠ may be short in hearts, and a trump lead is often best.

3. When partner has doubled the opponents' contract for penalty (or passed your takeout double). Low-level penalty doubles usually indicate a big trump stack. It is, therefore, very attractive to lead a trump.

Example:

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♣	Dbl	All Pass	

4. When a passive lead is desired but leading any of the side suits is too dangerous. For example, if the auction goes:

RHO	You	LHO	Partner
1♥	Pass	3♥ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
4♥	All Pass		

When 3♥ promised a limit raise with 10-11 points and 4+ hearts, it may be best to lead a trump from:
♠Q 10 7 6 ♥4 2 ♦J 5 3 2 ♣Q 4 2.

The opponents' nine-card fit makes a heart lead unlikely to blow a trump trick because you know hearts are splitting 2-2 for declarer. If partner has ♥Q 3 and a trump is not led, declarer's percentage play will be to cash the ♥A K anyhow. If partner has ♥K 4, leading a heart can't matter — he is either getting his king or not, depending on where the ace is. No other trump holdings in partner's hand matter. It might be reasonable to lead a heart from this deal even if the opponents only showed an eight-card trump fit. If partner holds ♥Q 6 3, too bad.

When not to lead trumps

When none of the above condi-

tions are present, it's probably best *not* to lead a trump as it may cost your side a trump trick. Even leads from apparently safe trump holdings may prove costly. For example: Leading the ace of trumps from the A-2 was disastrous on this deal. The result was a game swing — the trump layout was:

	Dummy	
	K 10 8 7	
You		Partner
A 2		J 9 3
	Declarer	
	Q 6 5 4	

Avoid leading a trump in cases such as these:

1. Holding a singleton. When you are short in trumps, your partner likely has length. Thus, a trump lead will help declarer to pick up the suit, plus it irritates your partner to have his trump honor or honor pickled! You can more likely help partner by leading from a long suit in the hopes of forcing declarer to ruff thus reducing his trump length to the same length or shorter than your partner's.

2. Having a holding such as hono third, Q-8-4 is another example. With this holding, a trump lead is likely to cost a trick. Or if you lead from J-6-3 and partner has the queen, a trump lead most likely makes your natural trump trick disappear.

3. The bidding sounds like the opponents have a misfit.

4. If partner is marked with a singleton trump, and you won't be able to lead another trump when next in. When that is the case, there is no point in leading a trump from K-7-3 because neither of you will be able to continue the suit.