

Examples 16 and 17

When one holds touching cards, such as K Q or J 10, and wishes to force out opposing winners, there is a natural tendency to begin the assault with one of these cards. It is a temptation that must be resisted, for unless you have a powerful sequence of touching cards it is often better to lead low on the first round. Here is a typical hand to illustrate the point:

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

After you have rebid your modest hearts, your partner has unselfishly raised you to game in the suit. West leads the queen of diamonds and you see at once that, with one side loser in spades, you have to avoid losing three tricks in the trump suit.

You win the first trick with the ace of diamonds, cash the ace of hearts, and come to hand with the ace of clubs. The fate of the contract depends on which heart you play next. If you lead the jack or ten, West will win with the queen and you will lose two more tricks eventually to the K 8. Clearly a low heart works better, for then you retain the J 10 as equals against the king.

When a mistake of this kind is pointed out, the declarer is apt to say, 'But if I lead low I risk giving them a cheap trick with the eight or some such card.' That is an illusion. If the hearts are 3—3, South will be able to lead the suit a third time and knock the honours together, so it makes no difference whether he leads high or low on the second round. If a defender holds K Q 9 x, he will make three tricks anyway. It can *never* gain to lead the jack or ten on the second round.

Here is another deal that exhibits the same principle:

♠ 7			
♥ 654			
♦ A7432			
♣ 9876			
♠ A	N	♠ J1096	
♥ J1098	W	♥ 732	
♦ KQ109	E	♦ 865	
♣ AJ102	S	♣ 543	
♠ KQ85432			
♥ AKQ			
♦ J			
♣ KQ			

South opened two spades, forcing for one round, and finished in four spades. West led the king of diamonds, won by dummy's ace. On the seven of spades East played the ten, quite a wily card.

South might have played East for A 10 alone, but he knew his safety plays and had the self-discipline to play low from hand. West's ace now captured nothing of value and the defence made just one more trump and the ace of clubs.

A little experimenting will show that when the object is to lose not more than two tricks with this combination, to play the king or queen on the first round cannot gain. If East had held, say, A J 10, he would have made a trick with the ten and later a trick with the ace—exactly the same as if South had played the king on the ten and returned a low one.