



Pat Harrington

Signal what you want, not what you have

A common opening lead against a trump contract is the top of two or more touching honors — the ace from A–K, the king from K–Q, etc. In notrump, declarer wins tricks with high cards or through length — period. In a suit contract, trumps allows declarer to win tricks by ruffing if declarer or dummy can be depleted of cards in a suit. The power of the trump suit makes the defenders more anxious to set up their tricks before declarer can ruff.

A good defender makes a plan. You review the bidding, analyze partner's opening lead and use dummy to help predict how declarer will play the contract. You decide what tricks you can provide and what tricks partner might provide. Once you've done that, you are ready to play your first card. Attitude signals are used in notrump *and* suit contracts. To signal as third hand, you need to know what partner's opening lead shows. Recognizing the different guidelines for leading against suits and notrump can help you predict partner's holding more accurately. For now, we'll stick with defending suit contracts.

You are East. South is in 4♠ after North opened 1♣ and raised partner's response of 1♠ to 2♠. What is your plan for defending 4♠? What

card will you play on partner's ♥A opening lead?

Dummy (North)

♠ K 6 5 3
♥ 9 8 4
♦ K 5
♣ A K 5 2

You (East)

♠ Q J 10
♥ 10 2
♦ J 9 8 7
♣ Q J 9 4

West leads the ♥A. You expect partner to have the ♥A K, but not necessarily the queen or jack. You have a doubleton heart. We frequently signal high-low to encourage with a doubleton to get a ruff. Was that your decision here? Did you play the ♥10 or ♥2 at trick one? If you play the ♥10, partner continues with the ♥K and a third heart. Take a look at the complete deal and see how this defense works:

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

If East plays the encouraging ♥10 at trick one, West continues with the king and another heart for you to ruff. The defenders have won the first three tricks. Are you happy? If

so, think again. Declarer still has the ♥Q. Given the bidding, partner can't have much more than the top hearts you already know about. Declarer will win your return, draw trumps in two rounds and claim. You squandered a natural trump trick on a ruff — a ruff that prevents you from defeating 4♠.

Let's start again. This time, focus on what partner should do rather than on your heart holding. The ♥A opening lead tends to show the ♥K, but what about the ♥Q and ♥J? If partner holds the ♥Q, he'll continue hearts regardless of your signal, but what if partner has the ♥J? If he does, you want him to abandon hearts. Once you gain the lead, you can return a heart to trap declarer's queen.

Play the discouraging ♥2 at trick one to warn partner that you have no help in hearts. As long as partner switches at trick two, 4♠ will go down. All you had to do was make a plan and tell partner what you wanted rather than what you had in hearts. Now that's good defense! □

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