

## **TRAVIS-T(ip) #7**

by Barbara Travis

### **LEADING PARTNER'S SUIT**

This tip comes from one of the two questions I am regularly asked about leading partner's suit.

Question 1: "What should I lead in partner's suit?"

Question 2: "Do you lead the highest card in partner's bid suit?"

If I answer Question 1, you will find the answer to Question 2 is "No, though there are exceptions."

Many players tell their partners that they MUST lead the highest card in partner's suit. This can be costly in many situations, so let's look at a few of them:

#### **EXAMPLE 1(a)**

Partner has opened or overcalled 1S and RHO ends up as declarer in 3NT. You hold Qxx. Let's give your partner A109xx and declarer KJx. If you lead the SQ, then declarer will have two tricks in the suit immediately. However, if you lead your lowest spade, partner will win the SA and return one through declarer's now KJ, so declarer only has one trick in the suit.

#### **EXAMPLE 1 (b)**

Exactly the same situation applies when partner holds the K109xx and declarer AJx. If you lead the SQ, then declarer has two tricks with their AJ. If you lead your lowest spade, partner will play the SK. Now your SQ is sitting over declarer's SJx so they won't have that second trick.

#### **EXAMPLE 2**

Partner has opened 1D and RHO ends up in a suit contract (or no trumps). You hold Kxx. Imagine partner holds AJ10x in diamonds and declarer has Qxx. When you lead the DK, you make the DQ become a winner. If you lead your lowest diamond, partner wins the DA and returns the DJ through declarer's DQ, and therefore has no winner in the suit.

#### **EXAMPLE 3**

Partner has overcalled hearts and you hold Jxx. If you lead the HJ, you will often find that declarer and dummy hold Qx and 10xx between them. Now your partner will have to play their HK, and eventually the H10 becomes an unnecessary winner, maybe even providing a critical discard.

As you can see, leading your highest card in partner's suit is clearly not the solution to your opening lead dilemma.

- If you have length (3 or more) to an honour in your partner's suit, you should lead low – fourth highest with 4 or more, third highest with 3.
- If, however, you have a doubleton, lead the higher of your 2 cards.
- The only time you might vary from the rule is if you are defending against a *suit contract* and have the Ace in your partner's suit. Since you aren't supposed to lead low from an Ace, IF you are going to lead the suit then you should lead the Ace (and receive a signal from your partner).

On the other hand, you may hold three-small cards in your partner's suit, say 762. This is a different situation from holding an honour in partner's suit.

- If you have been able to raise your partner's suit, THEN you should lead the 7. Since you have already raised the suit, then partner knows you have 3+ cards, so the lead of a low card would show an honour, whereas leading a high card will indicate that you have a poor holding in partner's suit (ie no honour). Your partner can then use this information to help work out their defensive plan for the hand. One of the useful things partner will know is that your points are in other suits.
- If you have not raised partner's suit (either from lack of opportunity or lack of points), THEN you should lead (preferably) your low card (the 2). If you lead the 7 partner might assume you have a doubleton which would prove awkward if partner cashes the Ace and King planning to give you a ruff. Second-best is to lead

the middle card, planning to play MUD (middle-up-down) but only if your middle card doesn't look high (like a doubleton).

In summary, if your partner tells you to lead the top card in their suit at all times, try to convince them otherwise. However, if you simply cannot budge them, just do as they say when you play with that partner, and then lead correctly with your other partners.