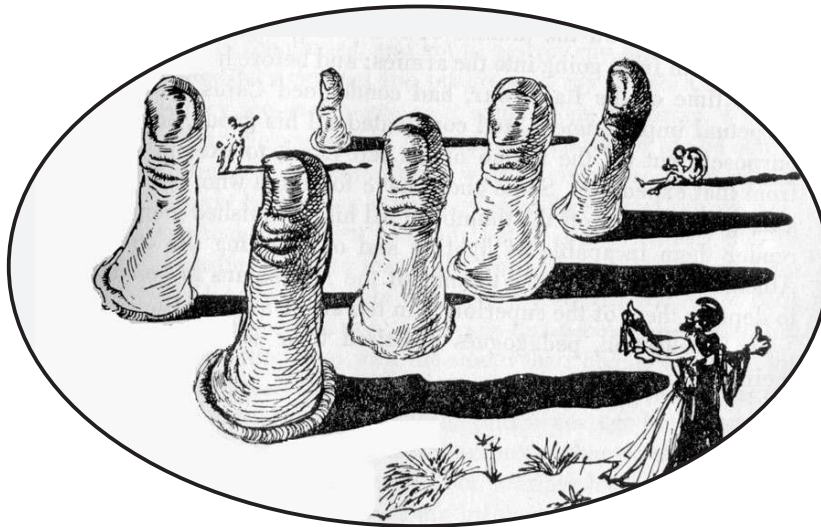
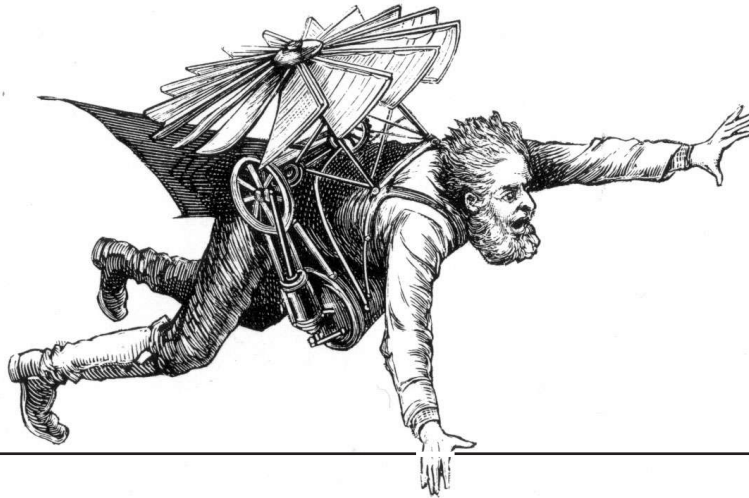


Rules of Thumb



Leads and Defense

1. Lead partner's suit
2. Return partner's lead
3. Against NT
 - Lead top of a sequence
 - Lead 4th down in your longest and strongest
4. Against suits
 - Singleton
 - Top of a sequence
 - Low from 3 or more to an honor
 - * Never from an ace
 - * Good from a king
 - * OK from a queen
 - * Blah from a jack
 - Top of a doubleton
 - Top of nothing
5. Cover an honor with an honor
6. 2nd hand low
7. 3rd hand high
8. Lead through dummy's strength and up to dummy's weakness



When to Lead Trump

Reduce Declarer's Chance to Ruff in the Short Hand

- Responder takes a suit preference
- Misfit hands
- Dummy denies interest in Notrump
- Dummy bids 2 suits and raises a 3rd

Protect Your High Card Strength

- You are strong in other suits
- The opponents are sacrificing
- You control their side suit
- Your side has a trump stack

When to Lead Trump

A trump lead can have a devastating effect, but you must listen to the bidding with a delicate ear to determine whether the right conditions obtain.

--Hugh Kelsey, Killing Defense at Bridge

When the dummy is placed on the table, the declarer can instantly survey the entire extent of the resources he has at his disposal. What's more, it is he himself who will select every card played from both sides of the table, with no need to communicate his ideas or intentions to his partner. The defenders are in quite a different situation. Each defender can see only half of the partnership's resources. Each may draw some inferences about the combined resources. Each may make some guesses. Each may have some ideas about how the defense ought to be conducted. But each of them is having these inferences, guesses, and ideas by himself, unable to share them directly with the partner with whom each must nonetheless coordinate the defensive play. This is why playing defense seems so difficult.

Listening to the bidding is one of the chief ways the defenders have of facing up to their difficult task. "Listen to the bidding with a delicate ear" advises Kelsey in his bridge classic entitled *Killing Defense at Bridge*. As we learn more in this lesson about when to lead trump, we will also want to be practicing our listening. It is listening to the bidding that will tell us when a trump lead is indicated.

What then, might we be listening for? Consider for a moment where tricks come from. They come chiefly from high cards, from long suits, from successful finesses, and from ruffing in the short hand. What if we could reasonably determine from listening to the bidding that the declarer may have opportunities to ruff for profit in the short hand? If so, then this would seem to be a circumstance for leading trump, to thwart declarer's plan by pulling his trump before he is ready to have it pulled. Our trump lead would reduce the number of trump in the short hand, and that would mean we would have reduced declarer's ability to use his trump for ruffing. Doesn't such an approach sound

potentially fruitful? Indeed it is! And in a moment we will learn what we should be listening for to pursue this concept.

But first let us also identify a second concept about leading trump that we will soon be discussing. Sometimes power is resisted by shape. Over an opening bid of 1NT, for instance, there are various interfering bids based on shape which players use to fight against the opener's high card strength, conventions such as Hamilton, Capeletti, DONT, Astro, Brozelle, Hello, and so forth. From such bids, situations can arise where you have high cards, but not the contract. Having the high cards but not the contract also arises whenever the opponents sacrifice against your game or slam bid. When you have the high cards and they have the shape, again, leading trump must present itself as a strong concept. The less trump they have to trump with, the more opportunity your high cards will have to prevail.

So these, then, are the two main categories of circumstances wherein a lead of a trump will likely be the best action:

- we want to reduce declarer's chances to ruff in the short hand;
- we want to protect our own predominance of high cards by reducing the opponent's opportunities to ruff them.

So we will seek to identify types of auctions that signal that one of these two general conditions is present. And we will want to examine some hands that demonstrate how the strategy of leading trumps works. To identify these auctions we will want to listen "with a delicate ear."

Here is a very common sort of auction that suggests a trump should be led.

Dummy simply chooses between two suits suggested by declarer

West		S	W	N	E
♠ K 8 4					
♥ A J 4 3	1	♠	P	1NT	P
♦ A 3 2	2	♦	P	P	P
♣ 4 3 2					

South's bids suggest his hand is unbalanced. He has at least 5 spades and at least 4 diamonds, and his point count is 12 to 17. South did not want to play 1NT. North will have between 6 and 9 high card points. More importantly, North will not have more than 1 spade, or else he would let South play 2 spades in a 5-2 fit. Neither is North saying that he loves diamonds; he simply indicates that a diamond contract is better than a spade contract. Surely declarer's plan will be to ruff spades in dummy before pulling trump. Therefore West should want to lead trump right away, to reduce dummy's ability to ruff spades. The trump to select is the lowest one, the 2 of diamonds.

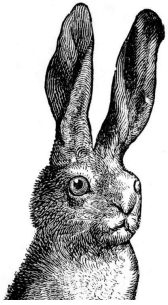
The whole deal looked like this:

	NORTH										
	♠ 3										
	♥ Q 8 7 6 2										
	♦ Q 8 4										
	♣ K 9 8 7										
WEST	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		EAST
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ K 8 4		♠ Q 10 6 5									
♥ A J 4 3		♥ 10 9									
♦ A 3 2		♦ 7 6 5									
♣ 4 3 2		♣ A Q 10 5									
	SOUTH										
	♠ A J 9 7 2										
	♥ K 5										
	♦ K J 10 9										
	♣ J 6										

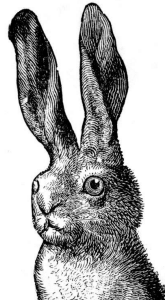
Could West have elected to lead the ace of diamonds instead of the deuce? Yes, he could have.

But by retaining the ace he retains control of the trump suit, not an inconsiderable advantage. If the trump lead were to turn out to be a mistake, for instance, West would be sure to get an opportunity to change course. What's more, if East, by some stroke of good fortune, were to hold either the king of diamonds or the ace of spades, he will be able to win that card and return trump again, even if he has only a doubleton. If so, West could win the ace of trump and lead trump a third time, wiping out dummy's trumps altogether.

In the present deal, however, the lead of the ace would be equally as effective as the lead of the deuce. Still, presume the deuce was led. South will see immediately what West is up to, but there is nothing he can do about it. Yes, he wins the first trick, he cashes the ace of spades, and he leads a spade for dummy to ruff. But now he cannot return to his hand to ruff a 2nd spade. Most likely he will play a small heart toward his king. If East has the ace of hearts and ducks, then South can ruff a 2nd spade. If East has the ace of hearts and jumps up with it to lead a trump, then he will set up both the king and queen of hearts for South. But East doesn't have the ace of hearts today. West takes South's king of hearts with the ace, cashes the ace of trump, removing dummy's remaining trump, and then switches to the 4 of clubs (top of nothing), fully expecting to find East with club honors. East wins, probably the queen of clubs, and he exits with his last trump. The defenders will still win 2 spade tricks and the club ace, setting the contract.



Hearing Test



Match the auctions on the right with the circumstances described on the left.

Your side has a trump stack

Total misfit

Dummy takes suit preference

Your side has strength in the other suits

Dummy denies notrump

Opponents are sacrificing

Dummy bids 2 suits, raises a third

West

♠ K 8 4
♥ A J 4 3
♦ A 3 2
♣ 4 3 2

S	W	N	E
1 ♠	P	1NT	P
2 ♦	P	P	P

West

♠ A J 8 2
♥ Q 9 7 5
♦ K Q 10 4
♣ 4

S	W	N	E
3 ♣	dbl	5 ♣	dbl
P	P	P	

West

♠ 9 4 3
♥ A 10 6 2
♦ Q 8 7 4
♣ 5 3

S	W	N	E
1NT	P	2 ♣	P
2 ♠	P	3 ♠	P
3NT	P	4 ♠	P
P	P		

West

♠ 7
♥ J 7 5
♦ Q J 8 3 2
♣ K J 6 4

S	W	N	E
1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠	dbl
P	P	P	1 ♥

West

♠ A J 9 6 4
♥ A 6
♦ 7 6 4 2
♣ 9 3

S	W	N	E
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♦	2 ♠
P	P	3 ♣	P
3 ♥	P	4 ♥	P
P	P		

West

♠ Q 8 4 2
♥ A 10 5
♦ A Q 2
♣ A 6 5

S	W	N	E
	1NT	2 ♦	*dbl**
2 ♥	dbl	P	P
P			

*Hamilton, 5-5 in majors

**8 or 9 HCP, to play or to defend

West

♠ Q 9 2
♥ K 9 8 2
♦ Q 7 3
♣ A 10 5

S	W	N	E
1 ♠	P	1NT	P
2 ♦	P	2 ♥	P
2 ♠	P	P	P

Total Misfit

West		S	W	N	E
♠ Q 9 2		1 ♠	P	1NT	P
♥ K 9 8 2		2♦	P	2♥	P
♦ Q 7 3		2♠	P		P
♣ A 10 5					

South's rebid of spades shows a 6-card suit; his diamond bid shows a 4-card suit. South's points are from 12 to 17. North shows 6 to 9 points. His refusal to take a preference between partner's two suits shows he has little in either. North will show at most 1 spade, and probably only 2 diamonds. His hearts should be at least a 6-card suit, marking him, most likely, with 4 clubs. South's refusal to pass North's 6-card heart suit suggests that he is void in hearts. In a word, North-South are sorely misfit. They wish that you were doing the bidding. North is correct to pass and seek to limit the damage.

Here is the whole hand:

	NORTH											
	♠ 7											
	♥ Q J 10 6 5 4											
	♦ 10 8											
	♣ K 9 6 2											
WEST	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		EAST	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♠ Q 9 2		♠ K J 3										
♥ K 9 8 2		♥ A 7 3										
♦ Q 7 3		♦ J 9 6 2										
♣ A 10 5		♣ J 8 7										
	SOUTH											
	♠ A 10 8 6 5 4											
	♥ -----											
	♦ A K 5 4											
	♣ Q 4 3											

Today's lesson has already taught us to lead a trump against a total misfit. Let's see why we want to do that by ignoring the lesson. What would we have led if we didn't know to lead a trump? Not wanting to lead into South's spades or diamonds, and not willing to lead the ace of clubs or to underlead it, perhaps we would have put the 2 of hearts on the table. Here is how declarer would then proceed. He would call for dummy's queen, and then he would trump East's ace. He would cash the top 2 diamonds and rough a diamond. He would call for the jack of hearts, upon which he would discard the 3 of clubs, letting you win your first trick. Now you are out of diamonds, and leading a heart is out of the question. Neither does leading the ace of clubs entice you, so now you lead the trump. South takes his ace and returns a club. You must go up with the ace. Otherwise, South, who has already discarded 1 club, will win the king of clubs and discard his last club on the 10 of hearts. The ace of clubs is your second trick, and you continue a trump. Luckily, East wins and can cash his diamond trick. And you will win the queen of trump before it's all over. South makes his two spade contract on the nose.

Do you see what trick South will NOT get if you make the best opening lead of the 2 of spades? That's right. He won't be able to ruff a diamond with his singleton 7 of spades. Bereft of that trick, South cannot score 8 tricks. He has seven tricks only, 4 trumps in this hand, the 2 top diamonds, and 1 club.

Lead your trump against a misfit. Don't let declarer get in an early ruff.

Opponents are sacrificing

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

South's pre-emptive opening shows a 7-card suit and a weak hand lacking defense. West doubles for takeout. If we just heard North's jump to game without East yet having the occasion to double, we could imagine that North was VERY strong with a few clubs. But East's double is for penalty. North hasn't overbid with a big hand. He, too, lacks strength. He expects East-West to make a game in one of the major suits. He has just taken South's opening pre-empt and expanded it all the way to the 5 level, applying pressure to East-West to find the best thing to do. East probably can't determine the absolute best thing to do. But he is certain that 5 clubs can be set, so East can be assured of a positive score with the double.

The whole deal looked like this:

	NORTH					
	♠ 7 5 4					
	♥ A 8 6 3 2					
	♦ 9 5					
	♣ 8 5 2					
WEST	<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	EAST	
N						
W E						
S						
♠ A J 8 2		♠ K Q 10 6				
♥ Q 9 7 5		♥ K 10 4				
♦ K Q 10 4		♦ A J 6				
♣ 4		♣ K 7 6				
	SOUTH					
	♠ 9 3					
	♥ J					
	♦ 8 7 4 2					
	♣ A Q J 10 9 3					

Again today's lesson tells us the most effective lead will be a trump. Leading a trump when the opponents sacrifice is almost automatic. Consider, however, an alternative, less effective approach. Don't the touching honors in the West hand invite the lead of the king of diamonds? If so, East may overtake with the ace and then cash the jack, so that West will know where all the diamond honors are. Now East decides to switch to his own touching honors and cashes the king of spades, and he then follows by cashing the queen of spades. East remembers West's takeout double, so West probably has a heart honor, and East switches to a low heart. Declarer wins with dummy's ace and leads a trump to his queen which wins. Now comes a diamond, ruffed in dummy, another successful club finesse, the cashing of the ace of trump, and south still must surrender a diamond. Down 3.

Will a trump lead do better? In the "instant replay," West leads the four of clubs, East decides to hold back his king, so South wins his 9 of clubs. South will be able to trump hearts in his hand all day long, but that doesn't matter because he will always win the trump tricks he has in his hand. South's problem are his 4 small diamonds. He needs a diamond ruff in dummy. Therefore he leads a diamond from his hand at trick two. West has no more trump to lead, so he does not go out of his way to win this trick - better that East wins it to continue trump leads, so West plays low. East wins the jack of diamonds, and even though he holds the king of trump, he still returns a low trump to South's jack. Ever the optimist, South again leads a low diamond, and East takes care to win with the Ace, returning the king of trump, wiping out dummy's last trump. Now South cannot avoid losing 2 more diamonds, as well as 2 top spades. Add it up. South is down 4 doubled.

Guess what? You just got a top board, and all you had to do is lead a trump against their sacrifice.

Your side has strength in the other suits

West	S	W	N	E
♠ Q 8 4 2		1NT	2	♦ [*] dbl **
♥ A 10 5	2♥	dbl	P	P
♦ A Q 2	P			
♣ A 6 5				

*Hamilton, 5-5 in majors

**8 or 9 HCP, to play or to defend

West, like most of us, likes to open 1NT and doesn't like it when the opponents try to wrest the hand away. But North is playing the Hamilton convention, and he barges in with a 2 diamond bid, which announces he has 5 hearts and 5 spades and some smattering of points. East doubles 2 diamonds. East-West discussed this sort of auction before the game, and they decided that they would double Hamilton bids if they held 8 or 9 points - now the 1NT bidder can decide whether he wants to try to play 3NT, or if he wants to defend the opponent's contract doubled. South chooses hearts over spades, and West decides that he cannot make 3NT, so he chooses to defend, doubling the contract to signify his decision to East.

Here's the hand:

	NORTH					
	♠ A 10 7 6 5					
	♥ K 8 6 4 2					
	♦ 10					
	♣ Q 10					
WEST	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	EAST	
N						
W E						
S						
♠ Q 8 4 2		♠ K 9 3				
♥ A 10 5		♥ Q 9				
♦ A Q 2		♦ 9 7 6 4				
♣ A 6 5		♣ K 9 4 3				
	SOUTH					
	♠ J					
	♥ J 7 3					
	♦ K J 8 5 3					
	♣ J 8 7 2					

North-South are attempting to counteract the greater strength of East-West by relying on North's shapely hand. West figures that trump leads will reduce the opponent's ruffing power, making the hand more akin to notrump, where the superior strength of East-West can prevail. So West tables the 5 of hearts. West retains the trump ace in order to retain control of the trump suit and the hand.

South sees that his hand does not match well with North's, and the trump lead is totally unfriendly. South will be happy just to win whatever tricks he can muster. He would love to ruff spades in his hand, but he won't get far, especially since the defense will be continuing trump leads when they get a chance. So South decides to try to set up whatever high cards he can. He ducks the heart lead, losing to East's queen. East continues the 9 of hearts to West's Ace, and West leads back the final heart, South winning the jack in his hand. A small club goes to East's king. East now makes an inference based on South's play. South must be very short in spades, not to be setting them up. But this does NOT make East interested in playing spades himself. He would only be setting up long spades in dummy. South is trying to make something in clubs, so East decides to play in diamonds, leading the 7. The seven should tell West that East does not have a diamond honor, but East retains the nine, because it could become valuable.

West wins the queen of diamonds. He sees that South may be setting up minor suit winners, but how can South ever get back into his hand? East promised 8 points and has shown only the queen of hearts and king of clubs, plus he has denied a diamond honor with lead of the diamond 7. So East must have the king of spades. Since South can be prevented from reaching his hand, West cashes the ace of clubs and leads the ace of diamonds, declarer ruffing in dummy. He comes off of dummy with a low spade, and East alertly plays the king, knowing that South is short in spades. This play drops South's jack. East returns the spade 9 to North's 10. Declarer now can cash the ace of spades, surrender a spade, and claim the final 2 tricks. All told, declarer has won three trump tricks and 3 spade tricks. Setting them 2 tricks doubled will be a very good board for East-West.

Your side has a trump stack

West	S	W	N	E
♠ 7 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ Q J 8 3 2 ♣ K J 6 4	1 ♠ P	2 ♥ P	2 ♠ P	1 ♥ ♠ dbl

Let's see now, there are takeout doubles, negative doubles, responsive doubles, lead-directing doubles, support doubles, and even more doubles. Does anyone remember the good old-fashioned penalty double? East sure did. West has already told his partner his story, so East has become the captain. And the captain has spoken - "Let's blast'em, partner. I've got strength and a mess of their spades." How does West know that East has spades? In part because he himself has only a singleton. But he also knows because the most reasonable way to set a 2 level contract when the opponents have bid naturally and shown a fit is if the defenders have a big stack of the opponents' trumps.

The whole deal looked like this:

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

When partner has a trump stack, you should unerringly lead a trump. Supposedly this was the opponents' strength. If it is eliminated, they will only have inferior resources left. Leading your own suit will only play into their hands. One of them will run out of your suit soon and start trumping it. Besides, you may want to get to partner's hand later, so preserve your most likely point of entry. Lead the 7 of spades.

South wins the lead with the ace of trump and returns a heart to dummy's king and East's ace. East now cashes all his trump. Dummy is out of trump, and South has only 1 trump remaining. East continues hearts to South's queen, and West puts on the jack, so that he won't block the suit! Desperate situations call for desperate means, and South leads low towards dummy's clubs and puts in the 8 when West plays low also. East wins the ace and cashes the heart 10. East's heart 8 is trumped. South leads another low club. West flies his king and returns the queen of diamonds. But South has the ace of diamonds and the rest of the tricks. South lost 3 trumps tricks, 2 heart tricks, and 2 club tricks. Setting North-South 2 doubled will be a top board for East-West. There can be a lot of profit from good defense.

Dummy denies interest in Notrump

<u>West</u>	S	W	N	E
♠ 9 4 3	1NT P	P	2 ♣ P	
♥ A 10 6 2	2 ♠ P	P	3 ♠ P	
♦ Q 8 7 4	3NT P	P	4 ♠ P	
♣ 5 3	P	P		

When North raises 2 spades to 3 spades, he shows an invitational range hand of about 8 or 9 points. South's 3NT, then, expresses the maximum of 17 points for a 1NT opener. Further, South will have few distributional values for his preference of Notrump over a spade contract. North, however, will have distribution. From North's point of view, something is wrong is with playing in notrump, and he feels that ruffing power will be useful. Was West listening to North's message? If so, he will want to reduce the ruffing power that North feels is important to their side. West should table the 3 of spades.

Here's the whole deal:

	NORTH											
	♠ K Q 10 8											
	♥ 7 4											
	♦ 9 2											
	♣ Q 7 6 4 2											
WEST	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		EAST	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♠ 9 4 3		♠ 7 2										
♥ A 10 6 2		♥ J 9 5 3										
♦ Q 8 7 4		♦ K J 6										
♣ 5 3		♣ A J 10 8										
	SOUTH											
	♠ A J 6 5											
	♥ K Q 8											
	♦ A 10 5 3											
	♣ K 9											

3NT has no chance, but 4 spades certainly does. Against inaccurate defense, North-South will lose only 1 heart, 1 diamond, and 1 club. Say, for instance, that West leads the club 5, hoping to try for a club ruff. South calls for the 2 from dummy, and East should put in the 10, losing to the king. South returns the club 9 to dummy's queen and East's ace. East, aware that both South and West are out of clubs, may mistakenly try to give West a chance to overtrump by continuing another club. Well, West won't be able to overruff the ace of spades! South next follows with a small spade to dummy's king and then yet another club, which he ruffs in his hand with the jack of spades. Now declarer can pull trump on his own, leading the 6 of spades to dummy's queen, and then cashing the 10 of trump. Now declarer plays hearts, losing his king to the ace, but the problems are all solved. South will finally have lost only the heart, the diamond, and the club. He succeeded by setting up the club suit and by getting 2 high ruffs in his own hand. Those ruffs were vital, weren't they?

So declarer's vitality is robbed on a trump lead. He can win the trump lead in dummy, play low toward his king of clubs, winning, play toward the queen of clubs losing, whereupon East returns another trump. South can win that trump in dummy and then ruff a club in his hand. But that ends South's fun. He cannot get back to dummy for another club ruff without letting West win a trick first. And when West wins his trick, he leads trump one more time, and the critical ruff of the fourth club can no longer take place.

Dummy bids 2 suits, and raises a third

West	S	W	N	E
♠ A J 9 6 4	1♥	1♠	2♦	2♠
♥ A 6	P	P	3♣	P
♦ 7 6 4 2	3♥	P	4♥	P
♣ 9 3	P	P		

A player bids 2 suits and raises a third. How many do you suppose he has in the fourth suit? On occasion he may show 2 cards, but typically there is no room for anything but one more card. That means he intends to capitalize on his ruffing power, so we will want to reduce that ruffing power.

Our ideas tell us that a trump lead is indicated. But we better think more deeply. North-South have plenty of strength. North has two potential suits for South to set up for tricks. At least one suit will probably come home for him. He doesn't need to ruff spades in the short hand for extra tricks - he just needs dummy's trump to control spades if we lead them. So if we lead the ace of hearts followed by the six, declarer may just pull trump and run his side suit to make his contract. What we need to do is to eliminate the dummy's trumps AND still be in control to cash spade tricks. The only way to retain control is to keep the ace of hearts. So our best lead is the six of hearts.

Let's look at the whole hand:

	NORTH										
	♠ 3										
	♥ Q 5										
	♦ A Q J 9 3										
	♣ K J 8 6 2										
WEST	<table border="0" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		EAST
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ A J 9 6 4		♠ K 10 8 2									
♥ A 6		♥ 8 7 4									
♦ 7 6 4 2		♦ 10 5									
♣ 9 3		♣ Q 10 7 5									
	SOUTH										
	♠ Q 7 5										
	♥ K J 10 9 3 2										
	♦ K 8										
	♣ A 4										

If West were to lead the ace of hearts followed by the 6 of hearts, then South would win 12 tricks, consisting of 5 hearts, 5 diamonds, and 2 clubs.

If, instead, West were to lead the ace of spades and continue a spade, declarer could ruff the continuation in dummy, play a diamond to his hand, ruff his last spade in dummy, play a club to his ace, and then play trump until West takes his ace. This time declarer would win 11 tricks, losing only the two aces.

If West were to lead the 9 of clubs to start the hand, South tries dummy's jack, but East covers, forcing South's ace. Now South returns a small spade, losing to East. East sees that South wants to trump spades and returns a small trump. If West takes the ace now, he can do South no harm. So let's say that West ducks. South has won this trick in his hand, so he leads a 2nd spade and ruffs it. He returns to his hand by cashing the king of clubs and ruffing a club with the king of hearts. Now he leads hearts and West wins the ace. This allows West to cash a second spade, so East's alert switch to a trump at trick 3 gained a trick for the defense, and North-South can take only 10 tricks.

But the killing lead, as we've suggested, is the 6 of hearts. South cannot simply drive out the ace of trump, because then he has 3 spade losers. But neither can he try to lose a spade immediately in an attempt to ruff just one spade. West will simply win the spade return cheaply, cash the ace of trump to eliminate dummy's ruffing ability, then he and East take 2 more spades, sending the contract down one trick.

This defense will strike some people as quite difficult. Perhaps it is. And yet, if you know that you should lead a trump when dummy bids 2 suits and raises a third, you are halfway there. If, next, you are reluctant to give up control of the trump suit, you will be reluctant to lead the ace of trump. These precautions alone may lead you to make the correct lead of the 6 of hearts, even if you had not considered that declarer had plenty of side tricks. Sometimes good guidelines will get you there, even if the details still elude you. And the bragging is just as good.

Switching to a trump when you didn't lead one

<u>West</u>		S	W	N	E
♠ 3					
♥ K J 9 5	1 ♠ P	P	2 ♠ P	P	
♦ Q J 10 9	4 ♠ P	P	P	P	
♣ Q 10 8 2					

Anytime that the opponents bid a suit contract, they are planning on trumping. But that does not mean that a trump should be led against all suit contracts, as future lessons will show. On the auction above, it sounds as if West should perhaps be trying to set up quick tricks in the side suits, so he may make a classic lead of top of a sequence, tabling the queen of diamonds.

Here's the whole deal:

	NORTH					
	♠ A 5 4					
	♥ 8 2					
	♦ 6 5 4 3					
	♣ K 7 6 5					
WEST	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table> </div>	N	W E	S	EAST	
N						
W E						
S						
♠ 3		♠ K 6 2				
♥ K J 9 5		♥ A Q 10 7				
♦ Q J 10 9		♦ 8 7 2				
♣ Q 10 8 2		♣ J 4 3				
	SOUTH					
	♠ Q J 10 9 8 7					
	♥ 6 4 3					
	♦ A K					
	♣ A 9					

On the lead of the queen of diamonds, dummy will play low, East will put on the 2, and South will win the Ace. Neither East nor West should be deceived as to the location of the king of diamonds.

Declarer has it. Since the declarer seems to be in a tricky mood, he will next cross to dummy with the king of clubs, then come off the table with the 8 of hearts. But East-West again should not be deceived; both should see that South wants to lose 2 hearts and then ruff hearts in dummy. Otherwise South would be pulling trump, or setting up clubs or diamonds. South doesn't want trump pulled because he doesn't have any suits he CAN set up. He needs to ruff in dummy.

So, West should take the 8 of hearts with his nine. Here comes the trump shift with the 3 of spades. It doesn't matter now what declarer does. If he ducks the ace to finesse, East wins the king and returns the 2. Then, when South leads another heart, East will win it (not West) and return another trump to wipe out dummy's trump holding. Thud is the sound of South's contract going down.

Sidelights

The main ideas of this lesson have been listening to the bidding and determining when to lead trump. But in the course of examining hands, various other important defensive concepts have arisen. Here are a few of those sidelights.

1. When leading trump, if you have the ace, usually lead a small trump and retain the ace to keep control.
2. Don't be hasty to grab an ace when declarer leads toward his king or his queen, or even his king and queen. Taking any ace means relinquishing control of that suit.
3. Pay attention to declarer's plan. Try to understand his intentions and his problems. Thwart the former and aggravate the latter.
4. Try not to lead into the suits that declarer has bid unless you can determine you won't be helping him.
5. Try to play your cards in such a way as to inform partner of what you have (or what you don't have).
6. If both you and partner are capable of winning a certain trick, decide who should lead to the next trick, you or partner. Then try to direct traffic in that direction.