

Winning Notrump Leads

By

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This book is very detailed and covers leads against 1,2,3 and 6 NT contracts. To discover the best leads, they used computer software to create 5000 deals with the West hand remaining the same and the other three hands were chosen randomly. In a NT contract where no suit has been indicated in opponents hands, it is usually better to lead a major suit. Bird calls this the Major Suit Bias. This assumes that declarer holds more minor cards than major.

The bidding is 1NT – 3NT or 1NT – 2NT – 3NT What would you bid holding:

#1 ♠ A Q J 8 ♥ 9 6 ♦ J 9 7 6 4 ♣ A 2

What do you know? Responder doesn't have a 5 card major or he most likely would have transferred. Likewise, he probably doesn't hold a 4 card major or he would use Stayman. Opener will hold a 5 card major roughly 10% of the time.

#2 ♠ Q J 10 3 ♥ K 9 7 2 ♦ Q J 10 3 ♣ 5

Again, what do you know? Partner may have at least 5 points. Hint: Leading from 4 cards to a high honor is rarely a good lead.

#3 ♠ 5 2 ♥ A J 7 ♦ K Q 7 2 ♣ K J 7 2

Leading from an honor combination often costs a trick and especially if only a 4 card suit.

#4 ♠ A Q 7 ♥ A J 3 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ 10 9 6

The lead of an Ace gives you the ability to switch suits if partner discourages the first suit.

#5 ♠ Q 6 ♥ K 5 ♦ 10 8 7 3 ♣ J 10 4 3 2

Here is a 5 card minor – do you really want to lead 4th from longest and strongest?

#6 ♠ A 7 ♥ 8 5 ♦ K J 9 6 3 ♣ A 10 7 2

#7 ♠ K 10 5 ♥ A 5 ♦ 10 8 6 5 3 2 ♣ 8 4

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CONCLUSIONS

1NT – 3NT

On average, after that auction, the defenders hold 7.2 cards between them in each major suit. Declarer and the dummy hold only 5.8. This creates a significant bias towards major-suit opening leads.

Leading from four cards to the Ace, King, Queen is rarely a good idea.

Leading from four cards headed by one or two honors not effective and may cost a trick.

A passive lead from a short major suit is better than leading from a 4 card or 5 card minor suit.

One of the best ways to defeat a 3 NT contract is to find a 5 card suit in your hand or partners.

Leads from a major suit doubleton fare surprisingly well, because partner is likely to hold at least 5 cards opposite.

When you have four cards in one major and a singleton in the other, it is often better to lead the singleton.

When you have a very weak hand, it is usually a waste of time leading from a long suit. Best to lead your shorter major.

Leading from three cards is better than leading from four cards.

Statistics on hands 1 through 7 below.

1.

♠A	36.7%
♠Q	33.6%
♥9	32.1%
♦6	33.6%
♣A	27.5%

4.

♠A	30.5%
♥A	29.5%
♦7	21.8%
♣2	26.7%
♣10	26.0%

7.

♠5	18.1%
♥A	27.8%
♦5	19.8%
♣8	15.2%

2.

♠Q	31.5%
♥2	24.0%
♦Q	26.9%
♣5	24.9%

5.

♠Q	14.3%
♥K	14.6%
♦3	11.0%
♣3	11.7%

3.

♠6	21.3%
♥9	20.6%
♦K	13.2%
♦2	14.1%
♣2	15.7%

6.

♠A	23.9%
♥8	23.9%
♦6	31.6%
♣2	19.2%

Leading after a Stayman Sequence

The bidding is 1 NT- 2 ♣ - 2 ♦ - 3NT What would you lead with:

#8 ♠ 10 ♥ K J 10 3 ♦ J 7 6 2 ♣ K 10 7 3

North's major is likely to be spades and partner might hold 5 spades. Your partner might not get a spade trick, but by leading a spade you will avoid giving away a trick in one of the other suits.

#9 ♠ K Q 3 ♥ K 8 6 Q 9 7 5 4 3 ♣ 7

North's major could be either spades or hearts.

#10 ♠ 9 7 Q 8 6 5 2 10 9 8 5 KQ

#11 8 7 Q 9 5 3 8 2 J 6 5 3 2

What would you lead in a 1NT – 3NT auction?

#12 K 10 9 3 KQ 10 7 5 2 7 6 2

The bidding is 1 NT – 2 - 2 - 3 NT

#13 J 6 3 A Q 10 7 4 2 7 2 5 2

The bidding is 1 NT – 2 - 2 - 3 NT

#14 8 7 2 A Q J 4 2 7 6 3 8 2

CONCLUSIONS after a Stayman sequence

If South shows no 4 card major you can assume they have the minors – so you don't want to give up a trick by leading into the minor suits.

Still, the major suit preference stands to be the best lead – especially if you are short in one major - your partner most likely holds a minimum of 4 and possible 5 cards. Hold on to your 4 card major as your smallest card may take the 4th trick.

8.		11.		14.	
♠10	28.8%	♠8	6.4%	♠8	10.0%
♥J	25.0%	♥3	6.8%	♥A	2.3%
♦2	26.7%	♦8	4.9%	♥Q	0.7%
♣3	21.9%	♣3	7.2%	♥4	13.8%
				♦7/6/3	11.3%
				♣8	10.6%
9.		12.			
♠K	17.2%	♠10	9.0%		
♥6	10.6%	♥K	12.4%		
♦5	12.0%	♦2	8.5%		
♣7	12.8%	♣7/6/2	8.9%		
10.		13.			
♠9	7.9%	♠3	19.9%		
♥5	14.8%	♥7	14.5%		
♦10	7.7%	♦7	21.3%		
♣K	8.3%	♣5	21.1%		

CONCLUSIONS – Leading after a transfer sequence

When choosing one of the other three suits, there is a slight bias in favor of the other major because dummy will not hold 4 cards there.