

Student Notes

Inferences at the Bridge Table.

Kooyong Tuesday 02 September 2025

(1) Clues For Declarer

Declarer is able to make deductions about the shape of the opening leader's hand from the first card. The lead of the two (♦2), if that's the fourth highest of the longest and strongest suit, will suggest that the opening leader's hand is generally balanced and one of three possible shapes;

4-3-3-3

4-4-3-2 or

4-4-4-1

In other words, they do not have a five-card suit at all. If they did, they would have preferred that, and there would have been a card lower than the one led. Based on leading the fourth highest of the longest and strongest;

if you held

♦A 10 6 2 the correct lead would be the ♦2.

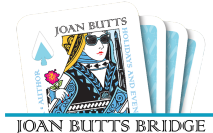
And if you held

♦A 10 7 6 2 the correct lead would be the ♦6, and you would play the ♦2 later, thus confirming you started with five cards. It's a matter of looking carefully at what card partner leads and then plays later.

Declarer will try to keep this fact in mind as they develop their own suits.

Quick Tips

- In no trumps, the lead of a two will show a lot about the shape of the defender's hand
- One can assume that if they held a five-card suit they would prefer to lead that, so they probably won't have a suit of five or six cards
- Their shape is likely to be balanced if their longest suit is four cards
- When declarer is playing their own suit, expect this suit to divide evenly because the defenders haven't shown extreme length in any suits



(2) Clues From Declarer's Play

As a defender, the more you watch and think about how declarer is attacking a hand from the outset, the more you will be able to work out what they hold. If they do not start by drawing trumps, there's a reason for that.

If they cross over to dummy to play a particular suit, there's a reason for that too. If they leave honours in dummy in another suit, it's usually as an entry to a suit they need to cross over to.

Your defensive detective skills will help you make the correct plays here.

Quick Tips

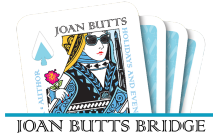
- If declarer holds both the ♦A and the ♦Q J 10 (in different hands) and is known to hold length in the suit, they will cross to the hand with the ♦Q J 10 and finesse against the ♦K
- If they don't make the above play, you can bet they don't have the ♦A, so if you hold the ♦Kx, your partner may hold the singleton ♦A
- Declarer may play the ♦Q hoping you will cover this with your ♦K
- Don't cover if you can count that your partner will hold only one or two cards in the suit
- If declarer has shown five cards, and dummy also has five of that suit, and you hold two cards, realise that your partner will hold only one

(3) More Clues From Declarer's Play

Every play declarer makes has some bearing on their hand. Defenders need to make inferences about declarer's distribution from the bidding, trump length, and whether there will be singletons or voids.

Quick Tips

- When declarer, in a trump suit, does not bother to trump losers in dummy's short suit, they either have no losers or no cards in that suit



- If there's a strong suit in dummy, missing the ♦K (e.g. ♦A Q J 10 x x) and declarer does not touch that suit, you can assume they have the ♦K
- If they didn't have the ♦K, they would have played on that suit early
- Don't cover an honour if you can count that your partner will hold only one or two cards in the suit declarer is playing
- You'll know this by working out from the bidding how many cards declarer holds in that suit
- If there's no benefit for your side in covering, then don't cover as it will only help declarer's side

(4) Clues from Partner's Lead

There are always clues for the defenders from the way declarer approaches the play of a hand, but only if the defenders are trained to look. There are also clues from what partner leads and why. We're trying to work out what's in partner's hand, and the lead is the best way to put the first pieces of information together.

Most leads follow a pattern:

Lead your long suit, either top of a sequence or fourth highest, or low from an honour.

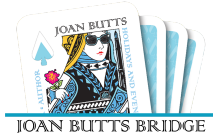
Don't lead a suit bid by the opponents.

If partner has bid a suit during the auction, and we're defending, we would expect partner to lead that suit.

When they **don't** lead that suit, there's a reason for that too. Think about it.

Quick Tips

- If partner holds a touching sequence in a suit
e.g. ♠K Q J 10 4, they will generally lead the top card of that sequence to promote winners
- When they don't lead their suit, they may hold a broken sequence



e.g. ♠A Q 10 7 4, and don't want to lead it until they know where the other honours are, or...

- They may need to see what's in dummy, or...
- They may need you to lead their suit, through declarer's hand
- If partner doesn't lead a suit they've pre-empted in, it's usually because they hold a singleton in the suit they have chosen to lead

(5) More Clues From Partner's Lead

Players love to lead an ace if they hold the ♥AK in a suit. It seems the safest thing to do (using hearts here as an example, but could be any suit).

Almost the same (though not so safe) is to lead the ♥K from the ♥K Q, to promote a trick early. Leading from a ♥K Q often spells danger, as you don't know where the ♥A and the ♥J 10 are.

If the ♥AJ10 are together in declarer's hand on your right, and you lead the ♥K from the ♥KQ holding, you have lost one more trick than if you had not led that suit at all.

Similarly, if the ♥J 10 6 is in dummy and the ♥A 7 5 is in declarer's hand, it's the same problem... you lose an extra trick. If you had left that suit for declarer to play, you would have made BOTH your ♥K and your ♥Q.

These are still the most popular leads. So when you're putting together a picture of what's in partner's hand after their lead, if partner doesn't lead one of the above combinations, assume they don't hold those cards.

Quick Tips

- Partner will tend to lead their best suit, even if they didn't make a bid
- The most popular lead is A from AK any time that person is on lead
- KQ in an unseen suit is popular too, but can sometimes lose a trick
- So, when partner leads, and dummy comes down with, for example, three little cards in another suit, assume partner doesn't have the two top honours (AK), so...
- Either the top two honours (AK) in that suit will be divided or declarer will hold them both