



BridgeHands eMag Newsletter

Notrump Double-talk

February 2006

Dear Michael,

When opponents begin and end the auction in Notrump and partner doubles, what are your partnership agreements? Do you lead a long or short major, certain minor, shortest suit, Spade, or something else? Does it matter if opponents made suit bids en-route to their game or higher contract? Read on – we'll take a look at agreements and a few situations where the top-dogs have shown their mortality like the rest of us.

On the topic of lead directing doubles, what better time could we find to review agreements when Right Hand Opponent cuebids our suit? Be careful before smartly placing your double card on the table.

Turning to the Laws, the ACBL has recently clarified its position when declarer begins to play a card from hand (L45C2). If you are a tourney player, check out this article.

Just for fun - the "knee jerk" Amnesia Double is one convention you do not want in your bidding arsenal! Also, "Holy Smoke, Batman – are we playing with a Pinochle deck?"

Note: Viewing the hands below requires your EMAIL reader to use "fixed fonts" (not proportional). If you have problems reading this document, please view our online [web-based copy](#) or [Adobe Acrobat PDF file](#) suitable for printing at the BridgeHands website

Partner doubles opponents Notrump game - now what?

Three Notrump Doubled and your lead partner! Gulp, we all recall "war stories" where our opening lead is akin to Luke Skywalker firing the proton torpedo at the Death Star's reactor shaft. One shot is all we've got. Is the Force with you? Better yet, do you and partner have an agreement on lead requirements for various auctions? Let's take a look at some common treatments used and a few hands where even the professionals get their wires crossed.

First, let's review the [Lightner Double](#) – typically used when opponents have bid slam based on strength, or our partner has made a preemptive bid. Ted Lightner advocated his double to ask for an unusual lead, never trump or a suit bid by

defenders. Ostensibly, partner's unusual lead provides doubling partner a precious ruff to set the contract. Hopefully, leader can deduce whether the suit is dummy's first bid suit (when other partner supported the side suit), or perhaps even a non-bid suit. Mike Lawrence's "Conventions" software program includes a nice sub-chapter on this handy tool. With the Lightner Slam Double as a foundation, we're ready to explore new lead-directing doubles.

Lead-directing doubles for unobstructed auctions should already be in our repertoire. After opponents' 1 Notrump opener, a double of responder's **2C** Stayman asks for a Club lead. Ditto on responder's other artificial bids (transfers, cuebids, step responses, etc), asking for a lead in the artificial suit. In a competitive auction, here's the popular guideline described in Bill Root's "[Modern Bridge Conventions](#)", requesting the partner of the doubler to make the specific lead in this order of priority:

1. Leader's bid suit

1H - (1N) - 2D - (3N);
X Partner should lead Diamond suit

2. Doubler's bid suit

1C - (1H) - P - (3D);
P - (3N) - P - (P);
X Lead partner's Club suit

3. Dummy's first bid (or shown) real suit

(1H) - P - (1S) - P; No bidding on your side, so
(1N) - P - (P) - X Lead dummy's Spade suit

4. If no real suits have been bid, lead weaker major suit

(1N) - P - (3N) - X; Lead your weak, short major

This treatment is fairly standard, also recited at the [ACBL website](#) with the following twist: when no suit has been bid, the double shows a solid suit which can take five tricks if the opening leader can find it. Without a clue, the opening leader will tend to lead a short major suit.

Mike Lawrence's "[Double! New Meanings For An Old Bid](#)" categorizes this concept as a Lightner Game Double (as opposed to the Lightner Slam Double), recommending this easy to remember treatment: "You- Figure-Out-What-Suit-I-Want Double". So when the opponents bidding is purely Notrump and #1 through #3 above are not applicable, this treatment gains good utility value over the more limiting request for leader's weaker major suit. Eddie Kantar expanded on this method in "[Defensive Bridge Play](#)" and other works, noting the leader should lead the shortest suit, preferably a major, but definitely a suit that has no honor cards.

Before moving on, let's clarify one point about #3 – leading dummy's first bid (or shown) real suit. What's with the "or shown" wording? Say the auction goes:

(1N) - P - (2C) - P;
(2S) - P - (3N) - X;

The suit shown, or more correctly, suit implied by responder/dummy was the Heart suit. Thus, partner's double asks for the dummy's Heart suit, not the leader's shortest suit nor the dummy's artificial suit (Clubs).

Incidentally, the Fischer Lead Directing Double never caught on with the masses, but since a few cohorts advocate its use, let's discuss it briefly. When opponents avoid suit bids en-route to 3 Notrump or higher, defenders normally lead a major to defeat the contract. To find the killing lead, the Fisher Doublers advocate the lead of a Club to set the contract, or a Diamond if the belated doubler had an earlier opportunity to double responder's Stayman bid. While this treatment has some merit, a greater audience enjoys the more flexible leads using the Lightner Game Double.

Finally, here are a few advanced treatments for the fearless, discussed in Eddie Kantar's "[Treasury of Bridge Tips](#)". Caution – these treatments pertain to OVERCALLS when opponents open the bidding!!! They are different from the above scenarios, where your side has opened the bidding:

When you overcall and partner denies support at the 2 level and belatedly doubles opponents' Notrump contract, lead the dummy's first bid suit.

**(1C) – 1H – (1S) – P; Partner denies support so
(1N) – P – (2N) – P; lead a Spade, dummy's
(3N) – P – (P) – X; first bid suit**

However, when it was not feasible for partner to support your suit at the 2 level (Left Hand Opponent bids above your suit at the 2 level) and Right Hand Opponent balances in Notrump, lead your overcall suit.

**(1C) – 1H – (3C) – P; Pard cannot show
(3N) – P – (P) – X; 2 level support so
lead your suit (Hearts).
Partner has useful cards.**

When partner bids a major and later doubles 3 Notrump, lead your short unbid minor suit, ergo a lead inhibiting double! Partner has a 2 suited hand, looking to promote an honor sequence in the side suit.

**(1H) – 1S – (1N) – P;
(2N) – P – (3N) – P;
(P) – X – AP Lead a short minor suit**

Here's the finale – when all four players have bid a suit and partner subsequently doubles their 3 Notrump contract:

1) lead the dummy's first bid suit if it was at the 1 level,
2) lead partner's suit if the dummy's first bid was at the 2 level. Memory Aid:
Lead dummy's anticipated four card suit

**(1C) – 1H – (1S) – 2D; Dummy 1st bid at 1 level so
(2N) – P – (3N) – X; lead Spade, dummy's 1st suit**

**(1H) – 1S – (2C) – 2D; Dummy 1st bid at 2 level so
(2N) – P – (3N) – X; lead Diamond, partner's suit**

Whew, Eddie's suggestions for penalty doubles after our overcall do make sense but can easily lead to confusion with our earlier treatments - save them for your long-term partners. For Okbridge subscribers, the [October 2000 Spectator newsletter](#) by Marc Smith discussed lead direction in contested Notrump auctions.

Okay, it's time to head for the trenches and see a few mishaps by the pros.

The first hand we will kibitz was at the [2005 European Open Bridge Championship](#)

Board 10, North dealer, All Vulnerable

```

                A 7 4 2
                5 3
                9 4 3
                A Q 7 3
K 9 8          J 10
6             Q J 8 7
Q 10 8 7 6    K 5
10 9 4 2      K J 8 6 5
                Q 6 5 3
                A K 10 9 4 2
                A J 2
                --
    
```

West	North	East	South	
		1C	1H	
3C*	P	P	X	* 3C - Weak Jump
P	3N	P	P	
X	AP			

Okay, what should East lead? At the table against 3 Notrump doubled, Saelensmidde led a club, allowing declarer to make 9 tricks for 750. While a Diamond lead would set the contract, we've learned that West's double is not a Lightner Game Double. With an agreed upon suit with partner, opener obliges with their first bid suit, making a Club lead (Rule #1). Perhaps West confused this auction with a treatment used by some when making a Lightner SLAM Double, asking for an unusual lead not in the bid suit. Watch out for this costly mistake and stick to your agreements.

The 2005 World Team Championship Board 7. Dealer West. All Vulnerable

```

                J 9 8 4 2
                A Q J
                A K J 3
                7
A 4           K 7 6
8 7 6        10 5 3 2
5 4          8 6 2
A Q 10 9 6 4 K 8 5
                Q 10 3
                K 9 4
                Q 10 9 7
                J 3 2
    
```

West	North	East	South
1C	X	P	1N
P	2N	P	3N
P	P	X	AP

With Zia Mahood playing in 3 Notrump in the South, sitting West what do you lead after partner's double? Here's another instance of Rule #1 in action – first lead option is leader's bid suit, our Clubs. Ah, we see the "jokester" Zia only held a half stopper at best with Jack-third in Clubs. Without a stopper, the Club lead puts the declarer down 4 tricks for a "phone number" (1100 points). Yet for some reason, West mysteriously lead the H7, setting Zia by only 1 trick and a paltry 200 points.

In the October 1987 Bridge World, the pros were asked to vote on this one:

West North East South

```
-- -- -- 1S
P 2C 2D 2N
P 6N X AP
```

As West, what will you lead holding?

```
8 6 5 3
8 7 5 2
7 4 2
7 4
```

Apparently partner does not want a Diamond lead after all – partner's pass would let you make that lead. If you picked a Heart, congratulations, your interpretation of the Lightner Slam Double is confirmed by most of the professionals. Still, a third of the pros went with the Club lead, so take solace if you didn't lead a Heart. The majority didn't like the Club lead since responder's 2C bid is based on length and strength – if partner has Club tenaces, they should not go away.

That's it for Double-talk this month. And if partner gets the lead wrong, remember [Eddie Kantar's levity](#):

1. Partner is void
2. Partner is leading a singleton, hoping for a ruff
3. Partner is leading a desirable sequence
4. Partner has the Ace, thinks opps' have the King
5. Partner has forgotten the bidding!

[You can always refer back to BridgeHands archives](#)

When opponents' cuebid your suit - Take that!

So, Right Hand Opponent cuebids our suit. If we double or pass, should these bids have a special meaning? If you're playing against advanced opponents, the answer is an unequivocal "yes"! Here's why. Let's say the bidding goes:

```
(1C) – 1H – (3C) – P;
(3H) - ?
```

Sure, it feels great to quickly thump the "big red X", i.e., "double" on the table, yet maybe that's not the most profitable action. Of course, we would never make an out of tempo call or use gestures that could provide Unauthorized Information, but how does the double help or hurt our cause? First let's explore how the opponents can make good use of our indiscriminate double in the above auction.

Advanced opponents can use a redouble to show a half-stopper and a pass to deny a stopper. Now isn't that nice for opponents when you double? Notice how Left Hand Opponent can describe two hand patterns without taking up a bit of bidding space! So perhaps we should go back to the drawing board with our indiscriminate doubles.

A better conventional partnership agreement is that our pass confirms the lead of previously bid suit, while the double requests the lead of another suit. Here are three scenarios:

A. 4 2 A J 9 8 4 Q 9 4 J 6

B. 4 2 K Q J 9 8 7 4 3 2 K Q

C. 2 K 10 6 5 4 K Q J 9 Q J 6

Taking a second glance at hand A, we note it barely qualifies for an overcall. Yet with no better lead proposition, we might as well pass to receive a Heart lead (make opponents earn their tricks after an anticipated 3N bid).

On hand B, we desperately want our Heart suit led so we should pass; if opponents take the 3 Notrump bait, you'll love partner's Heart lead and scuttle their contract. If opponents fall into your trap and you feel they won't run, you can belatedly double for penalty.

On hand C, a Diamond lead looks more profitable so we double this one to inhibit the Heart lead; we expect opponents to bid 3 Notrump by either bidding it directly or via their redouble mechanism so nothing is lost. Since our Diamonds have lots of sparkle, what can we do to prod partner to lead a lower ranking suit? Our first double said, "don't lead our Heart suit" and the belated double tells partner to lead the lower unbid suit. How clever. If we doubled and then passed, we're not being bossy requesting a higher ranking suit – this sequence simply empowers partner to make their best lead with no plans to set the opponents. In summary, when RHO cuebids your suit:

First Bid – Second Bid

Pass – Pass	Lead bid suit
Pass – Double	Lead my suit, penalty oriented
Double – Double	Lead lower bid suit, penalty oriented
Double – Pass	Partner makes best lead

Ready-Fire-Aim: Declarer begins to play a card from hand and then...

You are playing against a quick playing declarer who begins to face a card, but alas, declarer rethinks the situation and withdraws the card before it hits the table. Is this a problem?

At the Pittsburgh Spring 2005 NABC, the [Laws Committee \(LC\) clarified its position](#) when declarer begins to play a card from hand ([Law 45.C.2.](#)) The LC was asked whether it matters how long a face up card is maintained in position if it has reached the point of touching or nearly touching the table. Must declarer play a card if, while bringing it towards the table in a face up position, it touches or nearly touches the table even though the card is in constant motion?

The commission ruled that such a card must be played. The word "held" is not synonymous with the word "maintained" and should be interpreted separately. The fact that a card is in constant motion as it is being played and retracted is irrelevant to the director in deciding whether it must be played.

Of course, the determination when the card is "nearly touching the table" is still a matter of director decision. But as the Duplicate Decisions cite, "[In close calls, the Director should rule in favor of the side that did not create the problem.](#)"

Just for Fun, Part 1: Amnesia Double - For the hopelessly forgetful...

On the lighter side of lead directing doubles, what does this one mean?

(1C) - P - (1S) - P;
(2S) - P - (4N) - P;
(5C) - P - (5D) - X!
(6S) - AP

Oops! The double over opponents' 5D cuebid was intended as lead directing, but since the Right Hand Opponent is declarer, the doubler is on lead!

You've got it - this is our (in)famous "Amnesia Double". If you make this slip-up, tell partner you've been forgetful lately and the double seems to help you remember what to lead... Seriously though, avoid this feel-good impulse since you've just marked honors in your hand - make them earn that slam without easily finessing you (unless you are "Machiavellian", psyching declarer into mistakenly thinking you hold the honors not really in your hand).

Just for Fun, Part 2: Holy Smoke, Batman – are we playing with a Pinochle deck?

Here's a delightful story from Peter (OBI at Okbridge)...if you have ever felt like the bidding at your table is from Mars, you'll enjoy this one:

"When playing a bigger regional tournament in Bavaria some weeks ago, it happened - not far from the end of the event. It had started at 10 in the morning -- now it was about 6.30 PM and I was very tired. I was dummy with a very good hand; my pard had to play some slam -- I think it was 6NT.

I had to look for the restroom and it was a little bit urgent, so I asked opps to allow me to leave the table for that reason. When coming back some minutes later my pard had won his slam. There were only some minutes left to play the 2nd board and so I took my cards out of the board very fast. Again I had a wonderful hand with 24 HCP, 4 spades, 2/3/4 in the other suits.

LHO opened 1S, pass by my pard, RHO's bid was 3D - alerted as Bergen: 10 to 12 points, 4 spades.

I wondered a little about so many points in the deck, but it was a forcing bid so I decided to wait and see what would happen, and passed. And now LHO: 4NT - RHO: 5C (0 or 3 key cards). I made a lead directing double now with AKJ in clubs, LHO: 6 sp. After 2 more passes I doubled again and my pard leads ... the Ace of clubs!!! Can you imagine that I felt like I was in the wrong movie: 65 or

more points in one board and 2 Aces of clubs!!!

And now I saw it: I had taken my cards out of a board, yes, but it was the wrong board, the one they had played when I was looking for the restroom.

I called for the TD, now bewildering the other 3 players at the table. Because my wrong cards have had no influence on the opps' bidding they could play 6S ... for down 1; my pard made 2 tricks. I had really nothing in this hand but the 10 of hearts, so no real Yarborough but not the 24 points I had during the bidding!"

[BridgeHands thanks our friends at Fireside Chat for allowing us to reprint this July 2004 excerpt - please see their website]

We hope you have been enjoying the BridgeHands eMag Newsletter. Feel free to forward interesting topics to your friends. We look forward to hearing from you with your suggestions for future Bridge topics as well as your feedback.

Sincerely,

BridgeHands



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