

Leads versus NT I

Defense is difficult but opening leads are harder still because, except for the bidding and your thirteen cards, you don't have much information about the hand. At matchpoint duplicate, the difficulty is magnified because typically it is not clear whether your objective is to beat the contract or just not to give away an overtrick with your lead.

The subject of this lesson¹ is leading when the bidding goes 1NT – 3NT and your side passes. What do we know about the hand? Responder has 10+ HCP and lacks a 4-card major²; Opener has a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP. Though computer simulation, we find Opener's side will have an average total of 5.82 cards in each major. That means you and your partner have an average total of 7.18 cards in each major. Because generally you need to set up small cards in a long suit when defending NT, these averages translate to favoring majors over minors when making your initial lead.

Suggested Lead Priority vs 1NT – 3NT

- Safe honor sequence (KQJ(x), QJT(x), JT98(x))
- 5-card major (4th best)
- 4+ card suit headed by KQTx(x), QJ9x(x), JT8x(x)
- 4 card major suit without an honor (xxxx)
- 3/2 card major without an honor (xxx, xx)
- 3/4 card major with an A or K (Axx, Axxx, Kxx, Kxxx)

Major or Minor Leads vs 3NT

What would you lead from: ♠QJT3 ♥K972 ♦QJT3 ♣5 ?

You might think it makes no difference, provided you lead either of the Queens. However, the lead of the ♠Q is better than the ♦Q. Certainly not all the time, but at matchpoints, we want to have the odds in our favor. The lead of the major does that for us.

4th Best?

If your longest suit is a major, then the answer is not surprising. What would you lead from: ♠QJT3 ♥72 ♦AT853 ♣J4 ? The ♠Q is easily the better choice, especially with the honor sequence.

What would you lead from: ♠43 ♥54 ♦8653 ♣KQ832 ? The old guideline of “4th best from longest and strongest” would leave you no doubt about what to lead: a low ♣. However, either major lead is superior and not just by a little.

¹ Much of this lesson is from the book, *Winning NT Leads*, by David Bird and Taf Anthias.

² Some pairs open 1NT with a 5-card major and some bypass Stayman with 4333 distribution. This does not materially change the recommendations of this lesson.

Quiz 6: Leads vs 1NT – 3NT

In the quiz below, your RHO opens 1NT and the bidding goes 1NT – P – 3NT – All Pass. Circle your lead.

Board 1
North Deals
None Vul

	♠ A J 5
	♥ 9 6 5 3 2
	♦ A 10 7 6
	♣ 9

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

	♠ A 4 3
	♥ 10 9 7 6 3
	♦ K
	♣ A 7 5 3

Board 2
East Deals
N-S Vul

	♠ K 9 8 3
	♥ Q 9 7 4
	♦ 3 2
	♣ Q 6 5

Board 8
West Deals
None Vul

	♠ Q 10 7 6
	♥ 10 9
	♦ Q 10 4 3
	♣ J 6 3

Board 3
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

Board 9
North Deals
E-W Vul

	♠ 7 2
	♥ 7 5 3
	♦ 7 4 3 2
	♣ A 6 3 2

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

	♠ 6 5 4
	♥ A Q 8 7
	♦ K 7 4
	♣ 5 3 2

Board 10
East Deals
Both Vul

	♠ A 7 2
	♥ J 10 6 5
	♦ 5 2
	♣ A 7 3 2

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

	♠ 10 5
	♥ Q J 10 3
	♦ K J 10 6 5
	♣ 3 2

Board 11
South Deals
None Vul

	♠ A 7
	♥ 8 5
	♦ K J 9 6 3
	♣ A 10 7 2

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

	♠ K Q 10 4
	♥ 7 5 4 2
	♦ 10 7
	♣ K 7 3

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

	♠ Q 7 6 5
	♥ A 10 3 2
	♦ 4 3
	♣ K 9 7