



Rusinow Leads

Rusinow leads are used ONLY on the first trick against a suit contract, in a suit which partner has not bid. Late in the hand, or in partner's suit, the highest should be led from touching honors.

A denies the king except with AK doubletons.

K from AK - third hand should signal with the qxx or a doubleton.

Q from KQ. Third hand should signal with the Ace or Jack, but not with a small doubleton if dummy has three or four small. Declarer may duck, and partner continues into his AJ.

J from QJ; 10 from J10; 9 from 109.

With more than two honors in sequence, the second highest is still led (Q from KQJ, etc) followed by a lower one in most cases.

If the touching honors to be led are a doubleton, the top card should be led. Then when you play the second honor, partner will know you have no more in a suit.

This system was developed because of the ambiguity of the lead of a K from AK or a K from KQ by Sydney Rusinow.

For a longer explanation, see below:

The principle of leading the second-ranking of touching honors, devised by Sydney Rusinow, and used by him, Philip Abramson and Simon Rossant in the thirties. These leads were unaccountably barred in ACBL tournaments until 1964.

Ever since whist was "the game", the standard lead from either Ace-King or King-Queen has been the king. This ambiguity often gives third hand an unsolvable problem. Here is only one example of many:

North

West 652 East

K J104

South

?

Against a suit contract by South, West leads the king of spades. If he has King-queen, East wants to play the jack to encourage him to continue, however if he has the Ace-king, Easts wants to play low to get him

to shift. (If east plays the jack, west may try to give east a ruff, and even if he shifts, a trick will be lost if south has Q9x.

Some players favor the lead of the ace from Ace-king. Unfortunately this practice substitutes one problem for another. Often an ace should be led against a suit contract, without holding the king. But if this lead convention is used, a guessing situation is created - so much so that one is reluctant to lead an unsupported ace, even when it might be right to do so.

A sound solution was proposed 60 years ago by Sydney Rusinow,

The lead of second-highest of touching honors (king from Ace-king, queen from king-queen, etc.). Though endorsed by Ely Culbertson, these leads soon fell out of favor in America. They were adopted by many Europeans, however notably the users of the Roman Club, and later the little Major.

The details are:

A denies the king (except with ace-king doubleton - see below).

K from AK. Third hand should signal with the queen, or a doubleton.

Q from KQ. Third hand should signal with the ace or jack, but not with a doubleton, if dummy has three or four small. (Declarer may duck, and partner may continue into declarer's AJ.)

J from QJ; 10 from J10, 9 from 109. Note that this blends nicely into mud leads of second highest from 3 spot cards.

With more than 2 honors in sequence, the second highest is still led (q from KQJ etc.), followed by a lower one in most cases. The Romans lead second highest from an interior sequence also (10 from KJ10, 9 from K109 or Q109). This deserves more study; in any case, the problem is not too important, for the KJ10 is not usually a desirable combination to lead from, and the 4th highest is perhaps a better choice from the other two holdings.

Rusinow leads are used ONLY on the first trick against a suit contract, in a suit which partner has not bid. Later in the hand or in partner's suit, the highest card should be led from touching honors.

If the touching honors to be led are doubleton, the top card should be led. Then when you play the second honor, partner will know you have no more in the suit. On the following hand, this special feature of the Rusinow leads was crucial. Match points. E-W vulnerable. North Dealer

North

952

West KJ5 East

KQ AKJ94 A864

A4 Q3 86

1052 873

K87642 K1095

South

J1073

Q109732

Q6

A

North East South West

1D pass 1H pass

2H pass 4H pass

pass pass

Playing Rusinow leads, West opens the king of spades, which East instantly identifies as a doubleton (if it is a singleton, south has a hidden 5 card suit). East plays the eight, then overtakes the queen and returns the spade for West to ruff, setting the contract with the A of hearts.

Playing standard leads, East has to guess. He cannot be sure that West would have led low to the second trick holding KQx, for West might have been afraid East would shift to a club. Nor would it have helped West to have opened the queen, for East would surely have overtaken and tried for a club trick.

Against No Trump Contracts

If Rusinow leads work so well against suit contracts, should they be used against no trump also? Many think not, because the purpose of a lead against no trumps is entirely different. Against a suit, third hand has to know what specific honors the leader has, so the ace-king ambiguity must be resolved. Against no-trump, third hand has to know whether partner has led his side's best suit - that is, whether he has honors in the suit led, not which specific ones they are.