

Defense I: NT Leads

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 lesson 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 major¹; 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. Since generally you want 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, QJT, JT98)
- 5 card major (4th best)
- 4+ card suit headed by KQTx, QJ9x, JT8x
- 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, Kxxx, Kxxxx)

3rd Hand Play²

Third hand's responsibility is typically to play a high card if the opening lead is not an honor. Here's four common situations:

1. Partner leads a low card and dummy has low cards:

Play your highest card, or with a sequence of three or more, follow with the lowest of the sequence.

- a. With AJ7, play the A and return the J
- b. With K876, play the K and return the 6
- c. With QJ98, play the J and return the 8
- d. With KJT, play the K and return the J

¹ 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.

² From the Learning Center on Larry Cohen's website, www.larryco.com.

2. Partner leads a low card and dummy has the K, Q or J and you have a higher honor than dummy:

Usually, you withhold your honor and insert an “in-between” card.

- a. Partner leads the 4 and dummy has Q87 and plays low, insert the J from KJ3 or from AJ6.
 - b. Partner leads the 3 and dummy has the KT5 and plays low, you should insert the 9 from AJ94 or from AQ96.
3. You have a sequence, e.g. KQJx, QJT_x, or 987_x:
 - a. Play the lowest of these touching cards and return the highest card in the suit if you win the trick.
 - b. With a doubleton sequence, play the higher one and return/play the lower one.
 4. You can't beat dummy or partner has led a high honor:

Here you give partner an *Attitude*³ signal.

- a. If partner has led the **A** and you have the K_{xx} or Q_{xx} or 5-cards in the suit, play the highest card you can afford to encourage.
- b. If partner has led the **Q** and you have the A, K or J or 5-cards in the suit play the highest card you can afford to encourage.
- c. If partner has led the **J** and you have the A or K, play one of these and lead back the suit; if you have the Q or 5-cards in the suit play the highest card you can afford to encourage, e.g. with 98732, play the 9.
- d. If partner has led the **T** and you have one of the other honors or 5-cards in the suit, play the highest card you can afford to encourage.
- e. If you have none of the above, play a low card to discourage.
- f. If you have a doubleton honor, see 3 above, unless it will set up a trick for declarer, e.g. partner has led the A, the dummy has J32 and plays the 2 and you have Q7, play the 7 and hope partner continues the suit low and has another entry.

³ For this class, standard signals are used: High encourages and Low discourages when giving Attitude. When leading, typically Low suggests returning the suit; High (if not an honor sequence) suggests switching.

Quiz 12

Assume RHO is the dealer and the bidding goes 1NT – P – 3NT – All Pass. What is your lead?

	Your Hand	Your Lead		Your Hand	Your Lead
1.	♠ J86 ♥ 95 ♦ KQ72 ♣ KJ72		2.	♠ QJT3 ♥ K972 ♦ QJT3 ♣ 5	
3.	♠ Q965 ♥ T4 ♦ K82 ♣ QJT2		4.	♠ QJT4 ♥ 83 ♦ AT853 ♣ J6	
5.	♠ A7 ♥ 85 ♦ KJ963 ♣ AT72		6.	♠ KT5 ♥ A5 ♦ T86532 ♣ 84	

Assume LHO is the dealer, the bidding goes 1NT – P – 3NT – All Pass, partner leads the card shown. Dummy plays the underlined card. What is your play? If you play an honor, assume it wins the trick, then what card would you lead back?

	Lead	Dummy	Your Hand	Your Plays		Lead	Dummy	Your Hand	Your Plays
7.	♠ A	♠ <u>3</u> ♥ K43 ♦ AQJ4 ♣ 7652	♠ T87 ♥ A987 ♦ K2 ♣ T943		8.	♠ J	♠ <u>K</u> ♥ A62 ♦ JT962 ♣ K53	♠ 9542 ♥ T73 ♦ 43 ♣ AQJ8	
9.	♠ <u>4</u>	♠ Q <u>6</u> ♥ 853 ♦ KT4 ♣ AJT3	♠ KT72 ♥ A94 ♦ 653 ♣ 962		10.	♠ Q	♠ <u>9</u> ♥ QJ6 ♦ AKT98 ♣ 753	♠ A3 ♥ K74 ♦ 6543 ♣ T862	