

Making the Most Out of Royalty



In my first article, way back in the icy cold of January, I introduced two adages from my forthcoming book. They were ***Don't lead your honors, lead toward them***, and ***Visualize necessity***.

This month I want to elaborate with the use of several examples. Today's rules of the joust are that you have unlimited transportation between hands, but your side must always lead the suit.

Let's start with a straightforward case. To bring your contract home you must get three tricks from this combination:

Q J 2

A 7 5 2

You can always make three tricks if the suit splits 3-3 (a fair chance at 36%). Better, you can always make three tricks if your LHO has the king (50/50 proposition).

Lead low toward the Q-J. If the king appears, duck. If not, win with the queen. (What? RHO took the trick with the king? You'll have to rely on a 3-3 split.) Return to hand and lead low to the jack. Again, if the

king appears, duck; otherwise win with the jack. The ace is your third trick. The point of this exercise is that LHO must play the king BEFORE you play your honors, which allows you to score all three of yours. Follow this approach and increase your odds from relying on a 3-3 suit split (36%) to a very good 68%!

It's looks a lot tougher to get three tricks when your ace turns into a king and you have:

Q J 2

K 7 5 2

Not so. You have the same 68% chance. This time you are rooting for LHO to have the ace. If he does, you'll apply the same principal of leading toward your honors—once again the Q-J. If LHO has the ace, he must play it before you play your honors and you will score all three of them.

Note that you can't pull this off leading toward the king because you can only do it once. The second time you'll have to lead an honor and the ace will capture it.

Of course, if RHO has the ace, you are back to relying upon the 3-3 suit split to score your third trick.

Let's add a few cards:

A Q 6 3

J 8 5 4 2

You have nine of the suit; the



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opposition has four. If they split 2-2, you can grab four tricks even if RHO has K-x. You lead low toward the A-Q, if the king doesn't appear, stick in the queen. RHO gets that trick and you have the rest.

What if you don't know the suit split and still need four tricks? Is there any combination of the cards that will prevent you from winning four tricks?

Yes. The K-10-9-7 are missing. If either opponent has all four and plays his hand correctly, he gets two tricks. .

Visualize Necessity

Given a 4-0 split is hopeless, you visualize necessity and put one in each hand. Since 2-2 is a gimme, you are concerned about 3-1 splits, but leading toward the A-Q will carry you through.

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The worst case is that RHO has the singleton king, it captures your queen, (don't you hate it when that happens?) but your A-J combination takes care of the remaining cards and the suit is all yours. Why not just play the ace, capturing a singleton king should it exist? Then, if the king doesn't fall, concede a trick to the king and score the rest of your cards. You get the same four tricks that way.

**In matchpoint Scoring,
Extra Tricks are Critical**

Yes, but you won't get five tricks unless the king is a singleton, which is unlikely. If you use the suggested approach, you'll score five tricks whenever LHO has a doubleton king, which is about three times more likely than RHO having the singleton.

In the pairs games we play at the club (matchpoint scoring) every trick counts. Making your contract is good, but making extra tricks is better. You need to give yourself every chance to score extra tricks.

Here's another frequent situation at the tables. With

J 4
A K 7 5 2

you need to score as many tricks as possible. This time the trick is

to lead up to the jack. If LHO has the queen, you'll score your jack, the A-K and a fourth trick (unless the suit splits 5-1 or worse against you—16%).

If RHO has the queen, your jack is toast. You'll get your A-K and two more if the suit splits 3-3 (36%) or have to lose another trick and score the last one if the suit splits 4-2 (48%).



I suspect a lot of you might be tempted to lead the jack toward the A-K. If LHO has the queen, it takes the jack and you are back to relying on suit splits.

If RHO has the queen, she covers your jack, driving out the ace, leaving you in the same position. If you lead the jack he is always eligible for a state funeral, and it hasn't given you any advantage. Whereas, when you lead toward the jack, 50% of the time you will be able to score a trick from the jack. That's a big advantage.

Here's another one where leading with the jack is not a good strategy:

A K 10 3
J 7 2

Now be honest: is your first thought to lead the jack? If so,



here's the full suit layout:

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

LHO covers the jack, you win the trick, but eventually you will lose the 3 to the 9, which you promoted when you put the jack's neck on the line.

Sometimes you can afford to lead your honors. With this holding

A J 10 3
Q 9 2

you have all the intermediate honors, so lead the 9, and if it holds follow with the queen. (That order allows you to stay in hand to take the repeated finesses.)

This time you need four tricks.

A Q 10 3
K 9 5 2

If the suit splits 3-2 it's duck soup. How about 5-0? Easy as pie. Lead low to the ace. If LHO shows out, cash the queen and lead toward the K-9 (good dog), finessing the jack. If RHO shows out, lead low to the king. Then lead low to the Q-10, again finessing the jack.

With a 4-1 split, you need to guess right. When's the last time you hoped for a 5-0 split?