

Lead Out of Turn - What Now?

You're the declarer, but your right hand opponent (RHO) just made the opening lead. You all know the drill. **Call the director immediately!**

You Have Five Options

When there's an irregularity, the next person to play *usually* has the option to accept. The opening lead out of turn is no exception to this. **You, the declarer, may accept the opening lead.** If you do so, you have two options:

- You may table your cards, become dummy, and let your partner play the hand.
- You may tell your partner to table his or her cards, study the dummy, then play from your hand.

You, the declarer, may require the opening lead to come from the correct opponent. The opening lead now becomes a *major penalty card*, and you have three options:

- You may allow the correct opponent to lead any card they choose. RHO's card is a *major penalty card* and must be played at the first legal opportunity.
- You may require the correct opponent to lead a card of the same suit. If you do this, RHO may pick up the prematurely played card and return it to his or her hand. There are no further penalties.
- You may forbid the correct opponent to lead a card of the same suit. If you do this, RHO may pick up the prematurely played card and return it to his or her hand. *This prohibition remains in effect as long as your left hand opponent holds the lead!* There are no further penalties.

These last three options are available any time an opponent gains the lead while their partner has a major penalty card on the table. What happens if you require the lead of the same suit and your opponent has no cards in that suit? The penalty card is still picked up and returned to offender's hand, your opponent can play any card they choose, and you kick yourself for not counting out the hand!

What Option Should You Choose?

Whenever one player has options after an irregularity, the option must be chosen without any help from partner. There's no one right answer to this question, but here are some considerations.

- What does the opening lead signify? Is it the top of a sequence? Is it likely to be a fourth-best lead? Is it the top of a doubleton, or perhaps a singleton?

Use the information derived from the opening lead while you answer these questions.

- What did the bidding tell you about your partner's hand? Does partner hold the strong hand? Where is partner's strength? Is partner likely to hold *tenaces*?

Example: Suppose partner opened the bidding 1NT. You know his hand is stronger than yours and is likely to hold the AQ or KJ combinations. If the opening lead is a spot card suggesting a doubleton or a fourth-best lead, accept this lead up to partner's strength. Let partner play the hand if your hand has been revealed by the bidding. Does your hand have hidden strengths? Accept the lead, but play it yourself.

- Does the lead attack your weak suit? Or does that lead play into your strength?

Example: You hold the doubleton ♣86, and the opening lead is the ♣Q. Clubs is not your best suit! Maybe you should require a lead from the correct opponent, and forbid clubs.

Example: You hold the doubleton ♣AQ, and the opening lead is the ♣9. It looks like your LHO holds the ♣K. Maybe you should require a club lead from the correct opponent. This may be your only chance to take two club tricks.

Proprieties

- You are allowed to ask your opponents if it is your lead.
- You are allowed to ask questions about the auction before you make the opening lead, but once your card is on the table, face-up or face-down, you cannot ask any questions until your next turn to play.
- If your partner is on lead, you are not allowed to ask any questions about the auction until partner's card is on the table. Do you know why?
- Make your lead first; then write down the contract on your personal score card. It saves a lot of time!

Making the Opening Lead: An Important Tip

Always make your opening lead face-down! The ACBL requires that the opening lead card is placed face down on the table, but many players forget this important tip. A face-down lead can be retracted without penalty when everyone yells, "It's not your lead!"

Remember, when any irregularity occurs, or you have any question about your options or obligations, **call the director.**