

## OPENING LEADS: Queen/Jack Combinations by Maritha

Why do we lead LOW from QJxx against no trump, but Queen from QJ10x or QJ9x? And why do we lead the queen from QJxx against a suit?

Against NT, when we have **only** two honors (or 2 touching cards) in a four-card or longer suit, we should lead low because we are less likely to block the suit and less likely to promote lower cards in Declarer's hand or dummy.

If you lead queen from QJ54 and your partner has almost any doubleton honor, s/he will have to either block the suit (handicapping your defense) or overtake your queen and give Declarer an extra trick. If partner holds Ax or Kx, then either Declarer OR dummy will have 10xxx or 9xxx (or worse—could even have 5 in the suit). If partner DUCKS your queen and Declarer takes the trick, you will think that partner does not have anything in the suit. Even if you lead the suit again, partner's honor will take the 2<sup>nd</sup> round and s/he will not have any more to return to you, thus handicapping the defense. (You lose tempo and probably don't get a trick you deserve.) If partner **overtakes** your queen (unblocking—expecting you to have at least QJ10x or QJ9x). Declarer now gets TWO tricks (if partner has Ace) in a suit where s/he was only entitled to ONE trick. If partner has King, Declarer gets THREE tricks in a suit where s/he was only entitled to TWO. Please note: **if you lead LOW (4<sup>th</sup>-best) and your partner has a doubleton honor, your timing is right and you get all the tricks you deserve.**

Remember: **Partner SHOULD overtake with a doubleton honor when you lead queen in a no trump contract.** Your queen promises jack and either 10 or 9, so partner overtaking ensures that your side gets the 3 tricks you deserve in a timely fashion. If partner does not overtake (an unblocking maneuver), you may not get your tricks in time (or ever). [Also, you lead queen from KQ109(x)(x) against no trump.]

In suit contracts, the priorities are a little different. You need **quick tricks**—before Declarer can start trumping losers. If you lead low from QJ54 against a suit, and dummy has K82 and partner has A103, partner may or may not put in the 10 spot. Partner may well fly with the Ace and then Declarer gets a trick to which s/he is not really entitled. If you lead the Queen, however, the King in dummy is finessed, and Declarer does not get any tricks. The disadvantage to leading the Queen is that sometimes Dummy has K10x and Declarer has Axx or Dummy has A10x and Declarer has Kxx in the suit, and you are now losing all three tricks in a suit in which you might have gotten one trick if you had led low (and certainly would have gotten a trick if Declarer led the suit rather than you). If, for example, you lead low in a suit (from QJ54) and Dummy has A103 and Declarer has K86, Declarer will probably play low from dummy (playing you for ONE honor and your partner for the other) and partner's 9 spot will force the King.

Remember, when your partner leads 4<sup>th</sup>-best against no trump and you hold an honor ABOVE an honor in Dummy, it is usually best to play a lower spot card (10, 9 or even 8 sometimes) rather than your honor—keeping your honor to “kill” the honor in Dummy. For example, partner leads the 4 of clubs and Dummy has K72, while you have A103. If Declarer plays low from Dummy, put in your 10. On a good day, you'll win all the cards in the suit. On a not so good day, you'll limit Declarer to one trick in the suit. If you have A93, put in the 9. If you have A83, flip a coin. (Declarer is certainly getting one trick with this lead. The 8 limits Declarer to one trick when partner has led from J1054 and Declarer has Qx (provided you wait for partner to play the suit next time). Playing your Ace would give Declarer two tricks.