

Alex and I have been zooming around like bridge-crazed roadies the past few weeks—first to the Can-At Regional in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and then straight to the Kitchener/Waterloo, ON Regional. It's been all bidding, playing, and caffeinating!

Alex was just 200 masterpoints shy of hitting Emerald Life Master status (that's a whopping 7,500 points!), and after our recent escapades, he's now only 131 points away. Wish him luck!

As for me? Let's just say I'm cheering him on from way, way behind... with about 1,300 points to go. It is super fun seeing old friends and meeting lots of challenges at the table.

Adventures from Alex and Barbara at the Table

East Deals	♠ 10 9 5	
N-S Vul	♥ 4 3 2	
	♦ Q 4	
	♣ Q 10 8 3 2	
♠ 8 4		♠ A K Q J 7 6 3
♥ J 10 6		♥ —
♦ K 10 6		♦ 9 8 7 5 3 2
♣ A J 9 6 5		♣ —
	♠ 2	
	♥ A K Q 9 8 7 5	
	♦ A J	
	♣ K 7 4	

I was East and Alex was West. I have never picked up a hand with 7-6. I was the Dealer and decided to open with 4S. I felt I had no defence against Hearts if the opponents should bid Hearts.

South bid 5H and Alex bid 5S. The Diamond Ace was in the South hand and Diamonds broke 2-2 so life was good and we made 6 but could not bid it.

West Deals	♠ 3	
None Vul	♥ 3	
	♦ A K 5 4 3 2	
	♣ J 8 7 6 2	
♠ K 10 9 8 2		♠ 7 6 4
♥ K J 7		♥ Q 9 8 6 4
♦ Q 10 8 7		♦ 9 6
♣ 9		♣ A 4 3
	♠ A Q J 5	
	♥ A 10 5 2	
	♦ J	
	♣ K Q 10 5	

I was South. Pass-Pass-Pass to me. I opened 1C. LHO bid 1S and Alex bid 2D. 2S by RHO and I bid 3NT. Alex jumped to 5C and we played it there. West was kind and led a small Spade. I won the Spade Q. When Dummy has more trumps than Declarer, it is essential to pretend that Dummy is actually Declarer. This means that the Diamond suit in Dummy had to be established by ruffing Diamonds in the South hand.

D Jack to Dummy's D Ace. I ruffed a small D in my hand. H Ace and ruffed a H in Dummy and now I ruffed another small Diamond in my hand. the Diamonds in dummy were now high from the top.

Clubs K and Q and then another H ruff in Dummy. Club Jack and now I could run the Diamonds from the top. Oh happy day!

THE SAD MOMENTS

But then came the hand where I committed to a specific defensive plan. I knew Alex wanted a Spade lead—he'd signaled that earlier—but I held the King-doubleton in Spades and four solid trumps (D QJ109), so I was trying to shorten declarer's trumps. When you have natural trump tricks, you do not want to do any ruffing. Eventually, I did lead the King of Spades, but Alex was so frustrated that I hadn't done it sooner, he overtook my King with the Ace—even though dummy held Qxx in Spades. Declarer was delighted and now made the contract.

The silver lining? Our room had a pull-out sofa. Alex insisted I should sleep on it. I nominated him instead. The debate is ongoing.

On another hand... Declarer was in 6H—or so I thought. Declarer and Dummy had bid Hearts and Axx Hearts was on Dummy's right (on my left). I held Jxxx in Hearts, and at one point, Declarer led the King of Spades. I ruffed it with a Heart and confidently played to the next trick. Only then, after the Director was called for a lead out of turn, did I realize he was actually in 6NT, not 6H. My "ruff" wasn't a trick at all. If I'd been paying attention, I would have scored a Heart trick and later a Club trick as well. This Declarer was the only one to make 6NT. Alex seethed quietly.

As for the pull-out sofa? It didn't matter who slept on it—because that hand had me lying awake all night anyway.

THE LIGHTNER SLAM DOUBLE by Barbara Seagram

The Lightner double is named after Theodore Lightner who invented it.

The double of a **slam** contract, OR the double of a 3NT contract, if made by the partner of the player on lead, instructs his partner as to what to lead. The double actually asks for **an unusual lead**.

If the doubler had bid a suit against a slam, it would be **usual** for his partner to lead that suit. After the double occurs, then the double says: "Do NOT lead my suit." That is what makes this a call for an unusual lead.

If the doubler had bid a suit against 3NT however, the double calls for the lead of that suit. OR if the opening leader has bid a suit, the double by partner says "Lead your suit." BUT against a slam, it says: "Do Not lead your suit or my suit."

Confused yet? When in doubt, the double calls for the lead of dummy's first bid suit (NOT the trump suit).

Let's take a look at an example of how this may come up in real life:

	S A6543 H J6 D A32 C KQ2	
S 10 H 987 D QJ1098 C J947		S KQJ97 H A52 D 75 C 1065
	S 82 H KQ1043 D K64 C A43	

S	W	N	E
1H	P	1S	P
1NT	P	3NT	Double
P	P	P	

West would always plan to lead the top of his sequence: Diamond Queen but East's double of 3NT commanded partner to make an unusual lead. When in doubt, partner is asked to lead dummy's first bid suit. West leads the S 10. This is ducked in dummy and East MUST be sure to overtake that S 10, in case it is a singleton. Indeed, East KNOWS it is a singleton as South would not have rebid 1NT with a singleton Spade...yes, even though North bid the suit. This rebid of 1 NT guarantees 2 or 3 in partner's suit. East continues leading Spades until the Spade Ace is played and later gets in with the Heart Ace, this scoring 4 Spade tricks plus the Ace of Hearts.

Without the Lightner Double, Declarer would make 3NT since West would lead the Diamond Queen.

ALL ABOUT CUEBIDS by TONY JACKSON of SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

with slight edits by Barbara

Dear Tony.

How can I tell if a cuebid shows a stopper or asks for a stopper? Or does a cuebid show support for my partner's suit? Help, I'm getting confused about cuebids.

Signed,
Dazed and Cue-fused

Understanding is Better than Memorization: Cuebids

It's time for you to change your approach: Instead of memorizing bids and their meanings, you need to understand the reasoning for the bids. If you understand the reasoning, it will be easier to remember them at the table. In addition, if you really understand a bid, you'll be better able to cope with interference and deal with difficult hands.

Auction number 1: Responder's Immediate Cuebid

(Bracketed bids) are opponents' bids

1H - (1S) - 2S

You open 1 heart, the opponent overcalls spades and your partner (responder) makes a cuebid. Partner is showing you 3-card or better support for your suit: a limit raise or better.

Why do you need the cuebid to show support? The reason is you need multiple different ways to show support: You need to distinguish between good support (invitational or better) and weaker support that is competitive but not interested in game.

Contrast that to this auction:

1H - (1S) - 2H

Responder is making a simple raise, 3 card (or better) support and 6-9 points.

or this auction:

1H - (1S) - 3H

Now responder is showing 4 card support but weaker than a limit raise. (2-6 dummy points). The 3H bidder has no interest in game but is just competitively bidding based on the LAW (the law of total tricks), which says you can safely bid to the 3-level when you have a 9-card trump fit.

Auction number 2: Advancer's Immediate Cuebid

(1H) - 1S - (P) - 2H

This looks somewhat similar to the first auction, but this time your opponents opened the bidding and you overcalled 1 spade and your partner, the advancer (responder to the overcall), cuebid 2 hearts. This is similar to the first auction in that the cuebid by advancer is showing support for your suit: a limit raise or better. This time, advancer has a slightly different reason for not wanting to jump to 3S with a limit raise: You overcalled, showing 8 to 17 HCP, so you might not have values of a full opening hand. If you, as overcaller, don't have 12+ HCP then 3S might be too high. After partner's cuebid you can tell your partner you don't have a full opening hand by bidding 2S. With a stronger hand (full opening values) you can bid 3 spades to invite game, or if you are even stronger, you can bid 4 spades.

Support Cuebids

Both of the cuebids described above show support for partner's suit. They can be made by responder after partner's opening bid, or by advancer after partner's overcall. Other cuebids may not promise support.

The purpose of these cuebids is to keep the bidding lower. Even so, both of these auctions are very similar: in both auctions the cuebid shows support for partner, a limit raise or better. The next auction is quite different.

Auction number 3: Opener's Cuebid

1D - (1S) - 2C - (2S)
3S

This time you opened the bidding, the opponents overcalled and your partner bid 2 clubs.

Here's a question for you: everyone is bidding. Do you think the points are split roughly 50-50, or do you think one side is significantly stronger than the other?

Answer: Your side is much stronger. Not only did you make an opening bid, but your partner's bid at the 2-level shows 10 or more points. So your side is close to game. Why are the opponents bidding if they don't have the points? They are bidding based on one suit and/or distribution. But they don't have the values, your side does.

In this situation, as opener, you might very well be interested in a notrump contract when you have extra values or a solid suit to run. You want to ask responder if they have a spade stopper to bid 3NT. How do you find out? You make a cuebid asking partner to further describe their hand, especially to bid notrump if they hold a stopper. Opener's cuebid here is asking for a stopper for notrump.

You would have bid notrump if you have the stopper, so the cuebid **ASKS** for a stopper. Opener's cuebid does NOT show support for responder's club suit.

Auction number 4: Responder's Delayed Cuebid

1D - (1S) - 2C - (2S)
P - (P) - 3S

This is similar to Auction 3, except it's responder cuebidding, not opener. This time opener is not showing any extra values, but responder is saying "hey, we have the values for game, but I don't have a spade stopper. If you have a spade stopper, please bid 3NT."

Just like auction number 3, responder would bid notrump if they have a stopper, so the cuebid **ASKS** for a stopper.

Notice that this is NOT a support cuebid by responder because it is not an immediate cuebid (as in Auction 1). This is a delayed cuebid and so it is asking partner to bid notrump with a stopper.

Auction number 5: Cuebid After the Opponents Have Bid Two Suits

1D - (1S) - 2C - (2H)
2S

This is similar to auction number 3, except this time the opponents have bid 2 different suits. Because of that, the cuebid has a different meaning here. To understand, think about this question: what would it mean if opener's rebid was 2NT or 3NT? It would show extra values AND it would show stoppers in BOTH suits the opponents bid.

So now what can opener bid if they have a stopper in 1 suit but NOT in the other? They can show the stopper with a cuebid.

Opener would bid notrump holding BOTH stoppers, so the cuebid in one of their suits **SHOWS** a stopper in **THAT** suit. This is called a **telling cuebid**: when the opponents bid 2 suits, you tell your partner the suit in which you have the stopper. (Ed. note: Partner must bid NT if she has the OTHER suit stopped.)

Other Cuebids

There are many other cuebids that can be made, but these are the essential ones to know about. Understanding WHY each cuebid means what it does will help your bidding more than memorization.

Here is a quick summary:

Responder's immediate cuebid: shows support.

Advancer's immediate cuebid: shows support.

Opener and responder bid different suits, and opponents bid **one** suit: cuebid **ASKS** for a stopper (by either partner)

Opener and responder bid **different** suits, and opponents bid two suits: cuebid of one of opponent's suits **SHOWS** a stopper in **THAT** suit. (Telling cuebid).

A big THANK YOU to Dr. Bob Vollbracht for his time reviewing this and providing extensive feedback. T.J.

Interpreting the Opening Lead by Andrew Robson

Note from Barbara: Click on my link which explains Rule of Eleven and that will help you a lot! <https://bit.ly/4nJs7Cy>

Many inferences can be drawn from the opening lead. Say the lead is a two. The leader has just four cards in the suit led: the two is his fourth highest – and (obviously) his lowest. He is unlikely to have a five-card suit elsewhere or he would have led it; if he turns up with a singleton elsewhere, his likely shape is 4441. If his four-card suit is very poor, his likely shape is 4333 – unless he has a second four-card suit that is even poorer.

Say the lead is an eight. Is it fourth highest? Or top of nothing? You'll need to look at your hand and dummy to decide. Apply the **Rule of 11** and if you get an impossible answer, it's top of nothing:

(i)	♦ A Q 4	(ii)	♣ J 10 5
♦ 8 led	----	♣ 8 led	----
	E		E
♦ J 9 3		♣ K 6 2	

In (i), subtracting eight from the number 11, giving just three higher cards than D 8 in N, E, S is impossible: you can see four. So D 8 is top of nothing and East holds D K. If you cannot afford to lose the lead, rise with D A.

In (ii), it is possible West is leading fourth highest from C AQ98(x). But if when you try dummy's C 10, East covers with C Q, you know West's C 8 is top of nothing and that East also holds C A. (This is because IF West's 8 was fourth-best, then East could have NO card that could beat the 8. If East shows up with C Q, then West's 8 was Top of Nothing).

South Deals		♠ A Q 7		
None Vul		♥ 9 6		
		♦ K 10 9 6 2		
		♣ K 7 2		
♠ 8 5 4 3 2				♠ K 9
♥ Q 10 4				♥ K J 7 5 3 2
♦ 8 4 3				♦ A 5
♣ Q 9				♣ J 10 4
		♠ J 10 6		
		♥ A 8		
		♦ Q J 7		
		♣ A 8 6 5 3		
West	North	East	South	
			1♣	
Pass	1♦	Pass	1 NT	
Pass	3 NT ¹	All Pass		

1. ♦ K109xx is worth more than three points, so push a bit.

Contract: 3 NT by South

Lead: S 8

On our 3 NT deal, West leads the eight of spades. subtracting eight from 11 gives an impossible three higher spades in N, E and S (N and S have four). The lead must be top of nothing. If you finesse, (i.e. duck the spade) East will win and will surely switch to hearts before you have knocked out the ace of diamonds.

Instead, you must rise with dummy's ace of spades and knock out the ace of diamonds. East wins the second diamond and switches to hearts, you winning the second round. You still have just eight tricks, but look at what happens to East on the fifth diamond:

	♠ Q 7	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9 (led)	
	♣ K 7 2	
♠ 5 4 3	W N E S	♠ K
♥ 4		♥ K 7
♦ —		♦ —
♣ Q 9		♣ J 10 4
	♠ J 10	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ A 8 6 5	

East must throw his penultimate heart to keep his guards in both black suits. Now you can lead a spade knocking out his king and setting up a second trick in that suit, as he has just one heart to cash. Nine tricks and game made.

Getting Fixed by Tony Jackson

One of my partners told me about a bad board he had in an online game. Everyone was in 4 spades, and he took 12 tricks, but every other table took all 13 tricks. It's a little hard to take all the tricks when you don't have a void and the opponents lead an Ace!

It turns out that his opponent led an unsupported Ace, which is considered one of the worst possible leads in bridge. We call an Ace "supported" if you also hold the King of that suit, and "unsupported" if you do not hold the King. Leading a supported Ace is considered one of the best leads in bridge, but leading an unsupported Ace is one of the worst leads in bridge - in most cases, that is. I'll discuss this below.

Why is leading an unsupported Ace usually so bad? It's bad because it means you have no chance of capturing the King or another honor card. Since your opponents have the contract, they are more likely to have the other honor cards, and you are potentially giving them an undeserved trick. This is especially true when your RHO (declarer) holds the King, which happens quite often.

But once in a while a bad play results in a good result. We call this "getting fixed". It's painful when it happens but you have to let go of it and laugh about it. If you obsess on it (as some do) you'll be an unhappy bridge player, because it happens so much.

Monday I was playing in a game in Sonoma and on the last hand, I picked up a relatively flat 10 count:

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

I was in third seat, and the bidding went pass, pass to me. Even though I like to open light when in third seat, I decided to pass because the hand was relatively flat. As soon as my pass card hit the table I realized I had miscounted my hand! I had 13 points, not 10. The hand was passed out, and it turns out my partner had 7 points and we had half the points in the deck. The bridgemate showed we got a 75% board for my error: I fixed the opponents! I'm not proud of it, of course, but it does show how a mistake can sometimes help the person who makes the mistake.

When the opponents do well because of an error, it does NOT reflect on your skill! It means you were unlucky, and that sometimes happens. You should comfort yourself with the knowledge that their errors will hurt them much more often than they will help. It does not pay to dwell on things you cannot control.

Leading Unsupported Aces

In the above story, I mentioned that there are times when it's appropriate to lead an unsupported Ace. I'm not saying it's routine or that you should strive to do it! I'm saying that it's not unheard of in some specific situations, and it can be effective. What are those times?

1. When your partner bid the suit
2. When YOU bid the suit and your partner supported the suit
3. When the opponents are playing at the 5-level or higher
4. When the opponents are playing a doubled contract.
5. When 3 suits have been bid and you want to lead the unbid suit

The first three are right out of Eddie Kantar's Modern Bridge Defense. The fourth and fifth are advice I received from two highly accomplished players. Let me discuss each one in more detail.

When Your Partner Bids a Suit

Consider this auction:

1S - (2H) - P - (4H)
All Pass

Your partner opened 1 spade and so you want to lead a spade. What if you had Ace doubleton in their suit? It's not unreasonable to hope for three tricks: Your Ace, partner's King, and a ruff. So you lead your unsupported Ace.

When You Bid a Suit - and Your Partner Supports You

When you have bid a suit, an unsupported Ace is probably a bad lead, unless your partner supported you. Then it *might* be a good lead, and it might be a bad lead. You don't know for sure, but you might lead it in hope that your partner has the King. After all, your partner did support your suit after you bid it, so you know they have a few cards in the suit - and a few points. You are hoping they have the King, which is not an unreasonable hope.

Perhaps the opponents have shown a side suit and you are worried about losing your tricks:

(1H) - 1S - (2D) - 2S

(3H) - (P) - (4H) - All Pass

After this auction, you are on lead against 4 hearts. You overcalled in spades and your partner raised you. Since your LHO (dummy) showed a diamond suit at the 2-level, they have some diamonds and it could be a long suit and a source of tricks. It's possible that if you and your partner have a couple of tricks in spades you could lose them if declarer can run dummy's diamonds and pitch spade losers from their hand.

This would be a reasonable time to lead an unsupported Ace: your suit was supported. It's a bit of a risk, but not leading spades is also risky. You don't want to lead an unsupported Ace often in this situation, but it can be worthwhile depending on the bidding and the rest of your hand.

When the Opponents are Playing a 5-Level or Higher Contract

Often, when the opponents have bid a slam, you will wonder "should I lead an unsupported Ace"? I read in Mike Lawrence's book on opening leads that it's one of the most common questions he gets, but he doesn't have a good answer! It can be good (so you don't lose your trick) but it can be bad (it can help their opponents by establishing their King for their 12th trick.) It's a guess.

The same logic applies - to a lesser extent - when the opponents are playing a contract at the 5-level to lead an unsupported Ace in an unbid suit.

When the Opponents are Playing a Doubled Contract

Perhaps the opponents bid to 4 hearts and your partner doubles the contract, presumably because your partner has several heart tricks. If you have an outside Ace you might want to grab it before the opponents get a chance to pitch their losers in the suit.

When the Opponents Bid 3 Suits, You May Want to Lead the Unbid Suit

1H - (P) - 1S - (P)
2D - (P) - 2H - (P)
2S - (P) - 4S - All Pass

You may want to lead a club, even with an unsupported Ace, and even from a holding such as AQxx.

One Last - and very important - Thing: The Rules Change After Trick 1

After the opening lead the standard is to lead the King from AKx. Leading the A from AKx is only ever done at trick 1. A lot of less experienced players don't know (or forget) this, but it's important.



WHY DO YOU WANT TO PLAY BRIDGE? by Craig Hemphill

- (1) The game is intrinsically beautiful from the logic of the game
- (2) There is a vast group of players
- (3) There is organized competition through the ACBL
- (4) There are games all over the world
- (5) There are games online
- (6) You can play after a few hours, yet continue to

learn, improve, and expand appreciation and enjoyment for the rest of your life

(7) Through the competition and ACBL, you can measure your ability and achievement through titles and a system of "masterpoints," the accumulation of which requires skill, dedication, and achievement in competition

(8) You develop lasting friendships

(9) You develop partnerships through deep discussions and experience

(10) There is a vast amount of literature — well over 5000 books on the subject, and almost 100 years worth of uncountable magazines in most major countries.

(11) Many goals, including national and World championships to dream of

(12) Constant mind stimulation

(13) Belonging to a complete subculture

(14) Being able to play on any given day, against the best in the world. Hardly any other sport offers such an opportunity.

(15) I could go on for a while, but you get the idea.