

## A Spot 4 the Advancing Player

by Jay Apfelbaum

This is a continuing series of articles written for the advancing player. I welcome any questions or suggestions about future articles. Please send them to the publisher. Who knows? You may be mentioned in a future article! Since beginning this series, I have been asked about several conventions. Keep asking! Your questions give me direction about what the next article should be about.

This month we will compare opening honor leads at suit contracts. Most players play a usual form of standard honor leads at suit contracts. Others use rusinow honor leads. Here is a table comparing them. The usual lead is bolded and underlined.

Usual Standard Honor Leads		Rusinow Honor Leads	
<u><b>A</b></u> K x	<u><b>J</b></u> 10 x	A <u><b>K</b></u> x	J <u><b>10</b></u> x
<u><b>K</b></u> Q x	<u><b>10</b></u> 9 x	K <u><b>Q</b></u> x	10 <u><b>9</b></u> x
<u><b>Q</b></u> J x	<u><b>9</b></u> 8 x	Q <u><b>J</b></u> x	9 <u><b>8</b></u> x

It appears there is no big difference between these honor leads. Consider the following problem. We are East defending a spade contract. West leads the ♣A (Standard Leads) after South opens the bidding with 1♠ and North raises to 4♠. Our side did not bid.

North

♣ J 10 3	East
♣ Q 9 2	

If West has the ♣K to go along with his ♣A, we will want to encourage him to lead a second club. If West does not have the ♣K, we will want to discourage him from leading a second club. It is possible that there is no way to know whether West has the ♣K.

Now consider the same lead (♣A) playing rusinow leads. We know that West does not have the ♣K. It is easy to play our ♣2.

We can see that leading an Ace without the King can lead partner to signal incorrectly. He cannot know with any real certainty that leading an Ace promises the King because there are times it is correct to lead an unsupported Ace. Holding the Ace and King, many players lead the King. That is the original standard lead. That leads to another problem.

North

♣ 9 8 3

East

♣ J 7 2

In the case, West leads the ♣K. He could have the A-K or the K-Q. If West has the K-Q, we want to encourage him to lead the suit again. If West has the A-K, we want to discourage him from leading the suit again.

Now consider the same lead (♣K) playing rusinow leads. We know that West does not have the ♣Q. It is easy to play our ♣2.

There are clear advantages to rusinow honor leads against suit contracts. There are disadvantages, however. Leading an eight could be from the 9-8 or the 8-7. More importantly, those playing rusinow honor leads will lead an honor from a short suit. Here is an example.

North

♣ 10 8 6 3

East

♣ A J 7 4 2

West leads the ♣Q. If West has the ♣K, we would encourage him to continue the suit. If West led a singleton ♣Q, we might want to win this trick and give him a club ruff.

Now consider the same lead (♣Q) playing standard leads. We know that West does not have the ♣K. It is easy to decide whether to play our ♣A.

Overall, I recommend using rusinow honor leads. There are many times when partner needs to know if we lead an unsupported Ace compared to when partner knows we have the A-K. Leading the King from the A-K just creates a different problem. Partner will be unsure what to do when our lead of a King could be from the A-K or the K-Q.

There are times that a standard lead is clearer, but this happens much less frequently.