

THINKING BRIDGE -- By Eddie Kantar
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Ace or king from A-K? By Eddie Kantar

One of the most desirable and common opening leads against a suit contract is from a suit headed by the ace-king. But which one should you lead? And which one should you lead later in the play - that is, after trick one? And how should partner signal?

In this day and age, most players lead the ace from ace-king against suit contracts unless holding a doubleton A-K, in which case the king and then the ace is led.

However, there is more - much more. There are times when the king is led from the ace-king at trick one. They are:

(1) In any suit *partner* has bid. (2) In any supported suit. (3) At the five level or higher.

In each of these scenarios, you may well want to lead an ace without the king. No. 2, particularly, has a high frequency and it is important that partner knows you don't have the king when you lead the ace.

After trick one, the king is led from the aceking. Later in the play, you may want to lead an ace without the king, perhaps to see if partner has the king. ***The ace from A-K is a trick-one convention only!***

Here is something to try that I am completely sold on and have been for years. It is leading the queen from an A-K-Q-(x)-(x) combination. It is easy to read.

If third hand or the dummy has the jack, the lead must be from the A-K-Q. When the jack is not visible, third hand should use the bidding as a guide. If partner is bidding strongly, assume A-K-Q. If declarer has been bidding strongly, perhaps having bid notrump, assume top of a sequence.

Assuming you have read the lead, give count under the queen. For example, if you play standard *count* and have the 9-3-2, play the 2.

When partner continues with the king or ace, give *suit preference with your next card*. That way partner will have a good idea what to lead next.

Say you have supported partner's suit and, partner leads the queen, and you have J-10-8-4. Play the jack promising the 10, allowing partner to underlead in case partner needs you in to lead another suit.

Now for a big plus: When partner leads the ace from ace-king he can't have the queen! This little fact helps third hand big time.

Another plus: When partner leads the king, denying the ace, you normally encourage with the jack or ace, but not with a doubleton - unless the jack is in the dummy. If low cards are in the dummy and you encourage with a doubleton, declarer, holding the A-J-x, will duck. When partner continues the suit thinking you have an honor, a trick will be lost. You have just encouraged partner to fall victim to what is officially known as a Bath Coup! It is so named because it apparently originated in Bath, England.