

NOTRUMP LEADS

Assuming the bidding goes 1NT – p – 3NT – all pass

What do you lead from a hand like ♠QJT3 ♥K972 ♦QJT3 ♣5 ?

	IMP (beats contract)	Avg. tricks MP
♠Q	31.5%	3.80
♦Q	26.9%	3.63
♣5	24.9%	3.52
♥2	24.0%	3.43

Note: Duplicate scoring is MP (matchpoint) whereas IMP (international match points) scoring is used primarily in team games. Most often in the article I am quoting, the relative results are the same, but occasionally the MP score will be slightly different.

In the above example, even though the spade and diamond suits are exactly the same, the top of a 3-card or longer suit in a major is better than the same holding in a minor suit. The reasoning is that the responder did not try a Stayman bid so does not have a 4-card major. Therefore, hopefully, you are more likely to find your partner with more cards, possibly even high cards, in a major suit than in a minor suit.

2) You hold ♠52 ♥AJT7 ♦QJ94 ♣J92. What do you lead?

	IMP (beats contract)	Avg. tricks MP
♠5	25.1%	3.47
♥J	22.6%	3.48
♦Q	23.2%	3.37
♣2	22.7%	3.37

The ♦QJ94 is normally considered a more attractive lead, but the major suit bias brings in the ♠5 in first place.

What about 4-card majors vs. 5-card minors? What do you lead from ♠QJT4 ♥83 ♦AT853 ♣J6?

	IMP (beats contract)	Avg. tricks MP
♠Q	24.3%	3.57
♥8	18.8%	3.15
♦5	18.7%	3.10
♣J	13.6%	3.00

The spade lead is better than the longer minor suit lead. It is noted however, that if the diamond and spade suits were switched, at match points it is better to lead the stronger 4 card diamond sequence because you are not setting anything up for your opponent, while at IMP's, the spade lead was still better.

The bidding is 1♠ - p - 1NT – all pass.

What do you lead from ♠K1085 ♥1074 ♦K76 ♣A54 ?

	Beats contract (IMP)	Ave. tricks MP
4♥	32.7%	5.81
6♦	29.7%	5.66
5♣	28.4%	5.66
5♠	26.9%	5.61

Leading dummy's suit might be OK, but leading from 3 cards to an honor usually gives something away. A passive heart lead is best with this kind of hand.

In fact, this is a point that should be central to any article on opening leads, whether against NT or against a suit contract. Underleading a king or a queen costs you an average of ½ trick. All too frequently a passive lead is best instead of trying to get your tricks as fast as you can.

In the above example, leading through the opponents spade suit might be best, but probably will give away at least one, if not 2 tricks. Imagine what happens if you lead the 5 of spades into AQJ9 of spades.

Conclusion:

- When holding similar hands in a major and a minor suit, you should lead the major suit. Even when the minor suit is better, it may be best to lead the major suit.
- Roughly, a lead from a 4 card major is equal to a lead from a 5 card minor.
- A passive lead from a short major is better than a lead from 4 cards to an honor in a minor suit.
- When your partner has failed to open the bidding, the prospect for a short-suit lead is reduced – particularly in a major suit.