



Declarer's Options with a Faced Opening Lead out of Turn

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Law #54

When an out-of-turn opening lead is faced for all to see, declarer is presented with a wealth of choices. So many that it is often confusing to the presumed declarer, i.e. the declarer based on the auction. Assuming the presumed declarer did not see any of the cards held by the presumed dummy—which forces declarer to accept the lead—declarer is presented three (3) choices, with options on the 3rd choice.

1. Accept the lead and see dummy before playing from hand to the first trick.
2. Accept the lead, spread his/her hand face up on the table, and make partner the declarer.
3. Refuse the lead and require the lead from the correct opening leader. The withdrawn lead becomes a major penalty card and that leads to three (3) sub-choices (under Law 50D).
 - a. Allow the correct opening leader to lead any card he/she chooses. The major penalty card remains on the table and must be played at its first legal opportunity.
 - b. Require the lead to be in the same suit as the exposed card.
 - i. This restriction is one time only.
 - ii. The exposed card is no longer a penalty card and is returned to the defender's hand. Knowledge that partner has that card and the implications of it being chosen as the opening lead are forbidden to the opening leader, that is, opening leader must ignore those facts unless that information is available or later becomes available by other, legal means.
 - c. Prohibit the lead to be in the same suit as the exposed card.
 - i. This restriction applies for as long as the person retains the lead.
 - ii. Same as ii under 3b above.

In sorting through these choices, the presumed declarer obviously wants to select the option most likely to benefit his/her side. In the discussion that follows, no single factor holds complete sway—especially since circumstances vary as to auction, declarer skill, strength, broken strength, etc.—so consider the aggregate of possibilities before making a selection.

Accept the Lead and Remain Declarer

Accepting the lead and seeing dummy before playing is only a slight advantage over the long haul, the long haul being all 13 tricks. It also allows your Left Hand Opponent (LHO) full, legal knowledge of the implications of RHO's lead. Nonetheless, this choice is often selected because you feel your auction identified the proper side to declare the contract and/or you can see the benefit of that particular card being played now, for example, it's a side suit you intended to establish, or it's a trump and you intended to pull trumps quickly. (You did have a tentative plan in mind already, didn't you?) Conversely, if you don't want that suit or card led, you know to look elsewhere among your options.

Accept the Lead and Make Partner the Declarer

If you've decided accepting the lead will be beneficial, the next decision is who should be declarer. Major considerations in making partner the declarer are:



Who is the better declarer?

Is the contract wrong-sided, which is often considered the case if:

- your suits are solid but partner might have broken strength or a lone honor (or honors) to be protected
- partner has the big(ger) hand and it should be hidden

Unless there is great disparity in declarer skill, having the contract played by the right side is usually the more important factor.

Refuse the Lead and Require the Lead from the Correct Opening Leader

As we learned earlier, refusing the lead results in the opening lead from the incorrect defender remaining on the table as a major penalty card. Whenever a defender has a major penalty card and his partner is to lead to the next trick, declarer has lead-directing options as per Law 50D2. 50D2 That's exactly the situation we find ourselves in and we have three (3) sub options to choose from. In the first one, the penalty card remains a penalty card, but in the other two options—which restrict leader's choices—the penalty card is returned to the defender's hand with the proviso that opening leader ignores the fact that partner possesses that particular card (and chose it as the opening lead) unless, of course, that information was disclosed during the bidding.

1. **Allow any Lead:** The benefit of the major penalty card remaining on the table (by allowing any card to be led) is almost always outweighed by the benefit of requiring or prohibiting the lead of that suit. But if you can't see a specific benefit of those options, allow any lead and keep the penalty card face up on the table. Selecting this option may lead to a bit of serendipity. If the opening leader retains the lead and the penalty card hasn't been played, the lead directing options are in play again. Now that you have a little more information, the benefit of requiring or prohibiting the lead of the penalty card suit may be clearer.
2. **Require Leading the Suit of the Exposed Card:** The one-time requirement to lead this one, specific suit (which loses the benefit of the penalty card) is often chosen when the lead will be into a tenace, or start setting up a long suit, or help enable a ruff by the hand short in trumps. Or maybe it's a trump and you think you want to pull trumps quickly.
3. **Prohibit Leading the Suit of the Exposed Card:** The on-going, i.e. as long as the lead is retained, requirement not to lead this one, specific suit (which loses the benefit of the penalty card) is often chosen when you fear this suit is your weak link in the contract. Perhaps the opponents have shown strength in that suit and there may be immediate losers there, or the lead may expose losers by dislodging your lone stopper. Or maybe you fear LHO will get a 2nd round ruff. If this is the right choice, it is often apparent.

Now that we've reviewed the possibilities and some of their ramifications, you should be in a better position to make an informed choice when faced with an opening lead out of turn. But remember, each time you face this decision, the circumstances are likely to be different, so consider the aggregate of possibilities (in light of your tentative plan for playing the entire hand) before settling on your likely best choice in the particular circumstances.