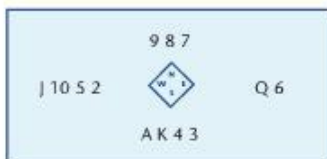




Chris Jagger



YOU lead the five playing third and lowest leads (see note on opposite page—Ed), to the queen and ace. Next time you get in you lead the jack; declarer wins with the king, and returns the four to your ten. Now his three is a winner, beating your two!

Leading fourth highest avoids frittering away that important five, but getting one bad score is not the end of the matter. There is a long-term psychological impact on partner, who for ever more will be searching for a reason not to lead the third highest, in case it is going to give away a trick. Thus I will have no idea whether he has three, four or five cards from his choice of lead!

This debate is all about whether you prefer to get simply a count of the suit (third and lowest leads), or whether you prefer to get partner's attitude to the lead, while at the same time getting an indication of the count (fourth highest leads). For example, if your partner leads the two against no-trumps, and you and dummy both have a doubleton in the suit, then you know that partner has only four, so declarer has a five card suit, and you will probably therefore switch. Playing third and lowest leads this would be far from clear.

However, I am not going to give you a series of hands where fourth highest leads work best – of course there are times they will work best, and equally there are times when third and lowest work better.



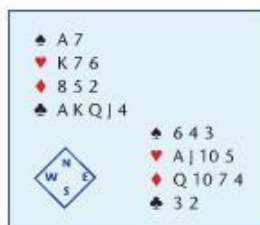
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## Fourth highest leads are best

Two top players debate a hot bridge topic. Tell us whose argument has won you over by e-mailing the Editor at [elena@ebu.co.uk](mailto:elena@ebu.co.uk)

Instead, I shall discuss two other main reasons to play fourth highest.

### We all like a man with attitude



Partner leads the two of hearts against 4♣. Playing third and lowest leads, inserting the ten could lose to the queen (possibly even the singleton queen), and then declarer may wrap up twelve or thirteen tricks, when you had three diamonds and a heart to take. The problem is that you do not know partner's attitude, only the count of the suit: he has three or five. The count might have been crucial later in the defence, but on this hand we need more information at trick one.

With fourth highest leads, you would insert the ten, and then decide what to do next. Playing pairs, cashing the ace could be correct, or switching to a diamond. You know that partner does not have the ace and king of diamonds, as otherwise he would have led one. At teams you would switch to a diamond.

It is quite possible that you will beat this contract by making three diamonds and a couple of hearts, or two diamonds and two hearts, or one diamond and three hearts. But which? Suppose you play a diamond to the king and ace and another heart comes back. Now what?

The answer is easy, as you show your count now. With Q-4-3-2, partner leads the two and follows with the three, show-

ing an odd number left. With Q-3-2, he leads the two and then the queen, to show an even number left. If he leads the queen and declarer ducks, his partner gives count to show the number of cards he has left (playing what is known as 'current count' is better than playing 'original count', as it doesn't rely on you remembering how many you started with!).

There are also many hands against no-trumps where it is useful to know if partner has tried to find a passive lead, or has led from strength.

### Familiarity is the mother of memory

The key to success at bridge is to be free of encumbrances, and focus on the matter at hand. My best run at bridge was with a partner whose system could be fitted comfortably on a postage stamp – not one of those big colourful ones from Equatorial Guinea, just an ordinary second-class postage stamp. We breezed in, we breezed out. We didn't worry about our methods, we just worried about the hand we were playing.

Most people play fourth highest leads in this country, and it is easiest to stick with what you are used to, particularly if you play with several partners. It is hard enough to decide which suit to lead, and by the time most people have decided, they are not always thinking about which card should be played. A former England international wanted to play third and lowest leads as they are 'better' – sadly they weren't better by the time he had defended a whole hand thinking I'd led fourth highest.

Ever since I lost my last debate about whether to take out 1NT doubled, people have come up to me moaning because they had a hand where I was right. Ignore my sage words at your peril! □

# Third & lowest leads are best



Experts call the system described by Barry Rigal 'Third and Fifth', but the name Barry has given it ('Third and Lowest') avoids ambiguity (— Ed).



Barry Rigal

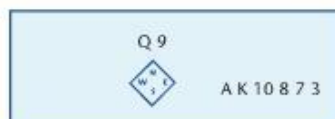
THE DEBATE

AT no-trumps, the defence seeks to establish and cash small cards. Against suits, the main target is to cash winners. Determining which winners will stand up requires both accurate count signals and leads.

Fourth highest leads, leading high from three or four small cards, is simplest and best against no-trumps, by placing the honours for partner. Against suits, however, I advocate third and lowest leads. They provide partner with what he needs, the count in the suit led.

This means third from an even number of cards (thus *third* from six, not fifth), low from an odd number of cards, top of a doubleton. Thus we differentiate by two cards how we lead from an even and odd number – high from even, low from odd. A two-card ambiguity will be very rare.

As East we defend a high-level contract after our pre-empt has been raised:



Should we switch or cash two winners? West could have any of these holdings:

J65	J64	J62	J54	J52
J42	654	652	642	542
J654	J652	J642	J542	6542

Attitude leads leave us groping. But even playing fourth-highest, only J-6-5 is revealing. All other holdings are ambiguous. By contrast, if playing third and lowest the six three-card holdings where the small card is a 2 clarify the position. (Note: South must follow with the high spot-card from 5-2 and 6-2, or East can decipher J-6-4 and J-5-4 as well.) A big edge for third and lowest.

What about the four-/five-card problem?

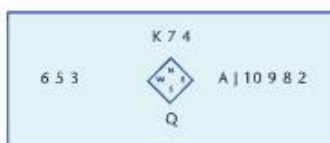


Partner has raised our overall pre-emptively, with four or five cards. There are six possible five-card holdings, fifteen four-card holdings.

Fourth highest will provide some help; the lead of the two (ten of the fifteen four-card holdings) gives us the count. But all the five-card suits might be four, if declarer does not play the two. Thus more than half the positions remain ambiguous.

By contrast, a third-and-lowest two clarifies five of the six five-carders immediately – and the potentially ambiguous J-7-6-5-4 is clarified when declarer produces the two. Equally, in the four-card suits, when declarer follows, he must reveal his shape. When partner leads the four from J-7-4-2, declarer must play either the six or five. The lead can no longer be from J-7-6-5-4 – it must be third highest from four.

Note the exceptions to third and lowest. When you have raised partner, you should lead top (not MUD) from three or four small to avoid this accident:



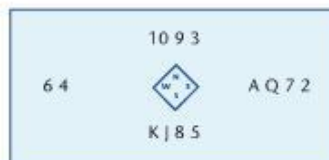
Equally, give West East's two, and the lead of the six from 6-5-3-2 prevents declarer stealing a trick. (A MUD five from 6-5-3 will not do the trick – it could be from Q-6-5).

There are other benefits, as here:



Playing fourth-highest, West leads the four to the ten, ace, and two. Does South have queen to three, queen-jack-small, or king-queen small? Contrast the position when partner leads a third-and-fifth seven from length. West won't have led low from touching honours, so he has K-J-7-4, and East should continue the suit.

Third and lowest lets both declarer and the defenders work out more – but not often. Indeed, sometimes declarer is more in the dark than before:



Playing third and lowest I lead the six to my partner's ace, and he returns the two. Do I have Q-7-6-4 or my actual holding? Fourth highest leads give the game away.

Equally, sometimes the third highest card is not affordable – but that simply requires judgment from the player on lead as to when he should not waste a spot card. This is why these leads don't work against no-trumps: you frequently cannot afford to waste spot cards. In no-trump, who wins the third round of a suit is far more critical than at suits, where the third round is likely to be trumped by someone.

In summary: the auction and his own cards will allow the opening leader's partner to work out the leader's precise holding more often when playing these methods. □