



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(126) Opening Leads: Rule of 11

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Level: 1

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General

When we play traditional 4th best opening leads (whether against suit or notrump contracts), it can be difficult to figure out exactly what holding partner has led from. We need a tool to help us figure out “What is going on?” and help us decide what to play at trick one. This tool is called the *Rule of 11*.

Rule of 11 - How to Use It

When we discuss Bridge, we try to avoid mathematics as much as possible, but we will need to do a little here. When partner leads 4th best we can calculate the number of cards around the table higher than the spot card led by using the Rule of 11. Let's see how it works through an example.

Example

Partner leads the ♥7 against a 3NT contract. We begin to apply the Rule of 11 by subtracting 7 from 11. $11 - 7 = 4$. 4 is the number of cards higher than the 7 in the other 3 hands (dummy, our hand, and declarer's hand). If dummy has Q83 and we have KT2, then we can see all four of these cards (K, Q, T, 8) and we know declarer does not have any card higher than the 7. If Declarer plays low from dummy at trick 1 (plays the 3) then we can play the 2 - knowing partner's 7 will win the trick!

Why the Rule of 11 Works

There are 13 cards in a suit. They are numbered 2 to 14, with the Jack = 11, Queen = 12, King = 13, Ace = 14. The number of cards higher than any given card is 14 minus (the card led).

Example

$14 - 8 = 6$. There are 6 cards higher than the 8 (9, T, J=11, Q=12, K=13, A=14).

When we lead 4th best we hold three cards in our hand higher than the one we led. To determine the number of cards higher than the one led in the other hands we

take away the three cards in the leader's hand as well: $14 - (\# \text{ of card led}) - 3 = 11 - (\# \text{ of card led})$. Thus, the Rule of 11!

Example

Partner leads an 8. $11 - 8 = 3$. There are three cards higher than the 8 in opening leader's hand and three cards higher than the 8 in the other hands. Imagine something like AJ983 in opening leader's hand and K, Q, T spread around the other three hands at the table.

Conclusion

The Rule of 11 is a valuable tool for helping us visualize all the hands. It helps us place the high cards around the table. Make use of this tool to help you determine what to play to trick 1 when you are playing 3rd hand.

Note: If partner chooses to lead something other than 4th best, the Rule of 11 breaks down and can lead you astray, but generally speaking this is a useful tool.