



Paul Hackett

# With ace-king, lead ace for attitude and king for count

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)

I WAS most surprised that when I was looking out for hands to illustrate the benefits of playing ace (and queen, from king-queen) for attitude and king for count, it was against international players who were purely playing count that the hands below occurred. I suggest that you lead the king when you want count, but the ace (or the queen) when you want to know if partner wants you to continue with the suit.

‘Why,’ you may enquire, ‘is it better *not* to play the lead of the ace to show the king and the lead of the king to show the queen, rather than vary it from hand to hand?’

Let us look at a simple example. We pick up A-K-x-x-x. We bid our suit in the auction and partner supports us and the opponents arrive in a suit contract. We lead our king and dummy goes down with two small. Should we switch or not? The important thing is to know partner’s count. No problem if you are playing count as if partner peters, you know he has four cards in the suit and you will look for a switch. If he shows three, then it is safe to cash the ace as it will stand up.

This hand came from the Swiss pairs at Scarborough when there were four internationals at the table:

Game All. Dealer South.

♠ 10 8 6		♠ Void
♥ 9 6 4 3 2		♥ A Q J 10 7 5
♦ 9 8		♦ A Q J 6
♣ A 5 4		♣ Q 9 7
♠ A Q J 9 7 3 2	♠ Void	
♥ Void	♥ A Q J 10 7 5	
♦ K 5 4 3	♦ A Q J 6	
♣ J 8	♣ Q 9 7	

Diagram: A diamond-shaped card layout with N, S, E, W at the corners.

♠ K 5 4	
♥ K 8	
♦ 10 7 2	
♣ K 10 6 3 2	

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

2♥ was game forcing and West’s action in not supporting diamonds is probably correct at pairs. North led the ♣A and South played the two, giving count. Can you see North’s dilemma? He switched to a diamond. A grateful declarer rose with the ace of diamonds and discarded his losing club on the ace of hearts, ending up making eleven tricks. If, however, you play the lead of the ace asking for encouragement, South would encourage. Now if he wins with the king of clubs and plays a third club, when he gets in with the king of spades he creates a trump promotion by playing a fourth club.

Not convinced? Consider this deal from the Swiss teams at Brighton; this time there were only three internationals at the table, but two of them were defending:

Game All. Dealer East.

♠ K 7 5 3		♠ J 10 8 6
♥ 10 9 7		♥ J 6
♦ K 9 5 4 2		♦ J 10 3
♣ 8		♣ A 5 3 2
♠ 9 4 2		♠ A Q
♥ K Q 8 2		♥ A 5 4 3
♦ 6		♦ A Q 8 7
♣ K Q 10 9 7		♣ J 6 4

Diagram: A diamond-shaped card layout with N, S, E, W at the corners.

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♣ <sup>1</sup>
Pass	3NT	All Pass	2NT

<sup>1</sup> At least three cards

After the king of clubs lead, East played the five, giving count. Believing his partner had a small doubleton, West switched and declarer quickly claimed his nine tricks. How much easier it would have been if West had led the *queen* of clubs, asking for attitude. East has a far easier time: he can either again play the five of clubs and partner has a good chance of reading it as a high club, or he can overtake with the ace of clubs and play one back.

If two top class pairs fail to get the defence right playing strictly count, what chance have the rest of us to get it right? I am a great believer in leading the ace (and the queen) for attitude and the king for count. There is also a case for playing the king for count or asking partner to drop the queen or the jack if he holds it, but that is another convention (*see page 33*).

Are there any exceptions? The most obvious one is when partner leads a high honour in a suit contract and there is a singleton in dummy. That is the time you should give suit preference. Thus a high card would ask for the higher of the other two suits and a low card for the lower. If you want partner to continue the suit he led, play a middle card. □

## MAGAZINE POINTS

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# With ace-king, do not lead ace for attitude and king for count

Or vote by post (Editor, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR). Comments for publication (not more than 200 words, please) are welcome.



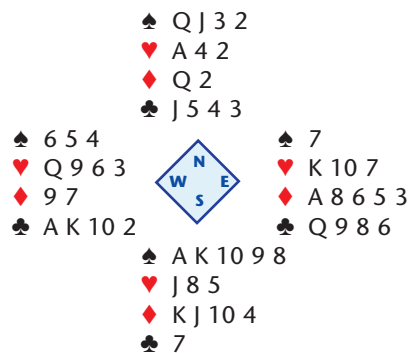
Heather Dhondy

WHAT do you lead from ace-king?

Paul Hackett will tell you that it depends on whether you want to receive a count signal or an attitude signal from partner. How do you know which one you want? You may have an idea from the bidding, or from the length of the suit in your own hand, but frequently you won't really know until you see dummy, so you have to guess. However, if partner knows – playing standard leads – what your lead is from (ace from ace-king, king from king-queen etc), he may be in a much better position to be able to give the most useful signal for you.

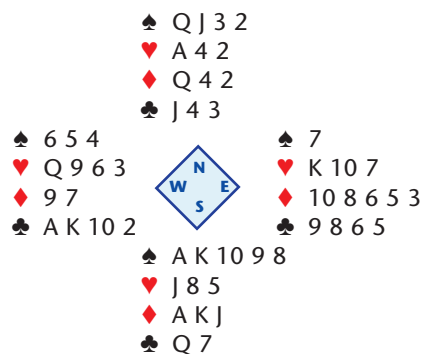
Before we move on to an example, there is a point to be clarified. Defending against high level contracts (five-level and above) or pre-empts, it is normal to play ace for attitude and king for count (hereafter referred to as AAKC), even playing standard honours. This is because you may well lead an unsupported ace against these contracts, and partner should encourage only with the king. For the remainder of this article, I am assuming that we are not defending against such contracts, and that it would be unusual to lead an unsupported ace, whatever method you are playing.

The strongest case for playing AAKC is that you can choose which signal to receive when holding the ace and king. Let's see how it works in practice. The auction goes 1♠ – 3♠ – 4♠, and you hold ♠ 6 5 4 ♥ Q 9 6 3 ♦ 9 7 ♣ A K 10 2. Playing AAKC, which club do you lead? I don't know. Do you want count or attitude? I don't know. Suppose we lead the ace, and dummy holds J-5-4-3, and partner encourages. If we continue the suit, declarer might ruff it, and we might lose a vital tempo, as in the following example:



A count signal would have been more useful here.

Suppose we lead the king, dummy holds J-4-3, and partner shows an even number. If we continue, declarer might have Q-x and we establish the jack for a useful pitch, as in this example:

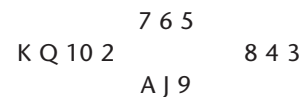


Attitude would have been more useful here.

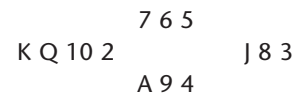
This isn't to say that traditional methods would resolve all these situations; I'm just suggesting that playing AAKC does not always help either. The real price you pay for playing AAKC is when you lead the king. Now partner doesn't know whether you have led from ace-king or king-queen and that can cause a big problem.

Proponents of the method might tell you that it is necessary to have some flexibility,

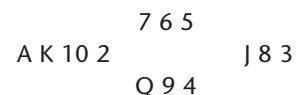
and that if the situation suggests that you should change your signal, then you can do so. For example, partner leads a king, and dummy holds three small cards in the suit. You will need to give attitude to get round the problem of being caught in a Bath Coup:



Suppose you lead the king, and partner gives count. You win the trick, but do not know who holds the ace and/or jack. I imagine that Paul would say that you switch to giving attitude here, as indeed I would playing traditional methods. So do we encourage, as East, if we hold the ace or jack? Here we certainly want to be doing so:



Now let's return to our original example of A-K-10-2. Playing AAKC, you guess to lead the king:



So is partner encouraging now? He was a moment ago on the same lead and the same dummy, but on this occasion West will not be amused when he continues the suit and discovers what has happened.

Playing standard honour leads, the solution is simple. The king can only be from king-queen, so East, holding the jack or ace, encourages when dummy has three small. This is because he is confident about partner's holding in the suit. □