# Counting Shape – III – Rule of Eleven

By Steve Moese

- **Stop**
- **Look**
- **Listen**
- **Analyze**
- **Plan**
- **Execute**

In Counting Shape I & II we reviewed how opponent's bidding describes shape and how we begin to build shape estimates. Assume a 2/1 Game Force approach – the more common duplicate system. Let's focus on how the opening lead can help declarer or defender

**How do we count SHAPE?**
1. Bidding
2. Opening leads/New Suit leads
3. Information from Dummy
4. Count Signals
5. The play of the hand (Discovery)

decide how best to play the hand. Here's where the **Rule of Eleven** comes in handy. Why do we call it the rule of eleven?

> **Rule of Eleven:** *Facing a 4$^{th}$ best spot card lead, subtract the spot card number from 11 to get the number of higher cards in the remaining 3 hands.*

So…. if partner leads the ♠3 and we are using 4$^{th}$ best leads, then there are 8 cards (11-3) higher than the ♠3 in the remaining 3 hands. Why does that matter?

```
                    ♠Q105
        ♠3 led…            ♠AJ84
                    ♠???
```

Well if you are defending, then partner's lead tells you exactly how many cards declarer holds higher than the ♠3 in the closed hand. Why? You can count the HIGHER cards in your hand and in dummy and subtract them from 8. The result must be the number of cards higher than the ♠3 held by declarer. In the example suit you know 8 higher cards are outstanding and you see 7 of them between you and dummy.

This information can guide you to the best card to play to trick one, and can help you count out declarer's shape. Here you must decide if you will get a good score if declarer wins a ♠ trick. If not then you have to play declarer for the ♠6 and insert your ♠8 on the 1$^{st}$ trick. That way you

```
                    ♠Q105
        ♠K9732            ♠AJ84
                    ♠6
```

can return a spade to partner's ♠K and collect 5 ♠ tricks in NT. What happens if declarer has the ♠9 instead? Then declarer will ALWAYS win a ♠ trick (Try it!!!). Can declarer hold the ♠K? Yes, and if so then declarer will always win 1 ♠ trick.

---

Change the situation ever so slightly and let's see how the choices change. Now you can count only 6 cards higher than the ♠3 so declarer must have 2 of them. The ♠2 is hidden for now – either partner or declarer might hold that card. If declarer holds ♠Kxx

```
                    ♠Q10
        ♠3 led…            ♠AJ84
                    ♠???
```

then declarer must win 1 ♠ trick. If declarer holds xx(x) in Spades, then your side will win either 4 or 5 tricks depending only on partner's length. Here the right card for the 1$^{st}$ trick is the ♠J, forcing declarer's ♠K or wining the trick. You will continue ♠s to win the rest later.

---

```
                    ♠Q10
        ♠7 led…            ♠AJ84
                    ♠???
```

Sometimes partner's spot card lead does not compute. Take this example. Subtracting partner's 7 from 11 leaves 4 cards and you can clearly see 5 higher cards. This means partner's lead was NOT 4$^{th}$ best. Partner is either leading the top of a doubleton, top of 3+ length or Middle-Up-Down (MUD) depending on your style. Whichever, partner will not hold the ♠K – you can count on declarer to hold that card. Indeed declarer rates to hold the ♠9 too

(unless partner made a MUD lead).  Continuing ♠s now could develop more tricks for declarer than for your side.  Better to consider whether a switch is right – study the dummy then decide.

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
| ♠7 led… | ♠Q65 | ♠AJ84 |
|  | ♠??? | |

One final idea… Partner's ♠7 lead suggests there are only 4 higher ♠s in other 3 hands.  You can see all 4 of them.  You want your ♠A to capture Dummy's ♠Q. Play the ♠4, confident partner will win the trick (and be surprised).  Expect partner to continue ♠s.

Pause to reflect on the bidding and the lead.  They bid to 3N in a non-Stayman auction.  If they have 25 HCP then partner has 6 HCP.  If they have 28, then partner has 3 HCP.  Partner's lead says declarer

| Dummy | You | LHO | P | RHO | You |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ♠Q65 | ♠AJ84 | 1N | Pass | 3N | All Pass |
| ♥K98 | ♥A3 | Partner leads the ♠7 | | | |
| ♦ J94 | ♦ 8762 | | | | |
| ♣AJ84 | ♣10932 | | | | |

does not hold a ♠ higher than the ♠7.  Resist the temptation to win this trick so you can switch to ♦s.  Partner might or might not have a side K. Better to duck and collect 4 ♠ tricks, setting the contract with your ♥A.  Let declarer work to find out where partner's remaining honors are.

| You | RHO | You | LHO | Partner |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ♠AJ842 | 1N | Pass | 3N | All |
| ♥A3 | Pass | | | |
| ♦ K87 | Opening Lead?? | | | |
| ♣Q93 | | | | |

Defending against and expert pair you ponder your opening lead.  You know partner will have close to 0 HCP.  You normally lead a 4th best ♠.  However partner cannot possibly have help.  Here you can gain a small edge on a declarer who reads your signals – lead the ♠2!!  Why?  Declarer will now think the outstanding ♠s are breaking 4-4 and will not worry about finessing partner as much. If you advertise your 5 ♠s too early, declarer might work to avoid your hand, with great success on this hand.  What do you do when in next?  Lead the ♠4 (continue the ruse) ♠s might just break 3-3.  You will have 5 tricks before declarer gets to 9.

### 3rd and 5th Best Leads
This spot card lead is popular among experts.  Many play 3rd and 5th leads against suits, while using 4th best leads against NT.  Many use them all the time.  Why?  3rd and 5th leads make leading from 3 cards easier to count correctly, introduce apparent ambiguity (declarer might not know which length is likely) and eliminates the Rule of Eleven.  That's OK.  Use the **Rule of 10 or 12** against these defenders!  Decide whether the opening leader led from a 3 or a 5 card suit.  Use the Rule of 10 if you suspect a 5 card suit and the rule of 12 if you suspect a 3 card suit.

Usually bidding or the dummy clears up whether a suit is 5 cards or 3 cards.  If the leader has bid the suit, 5 cards is more likely.  If leader's partner has bid the suit, 3 cards is more likely.  If the suit is unbid, look back to the auction – If the leader could have overcalled the suit cheaply and did not then there is a small inference that they are leading from 3 cards or a topless 5 card suit.

When you see the dummy you will see the number of cards you hold in the suit led.  If 5 or fewer, suspect a 5 card suit (subject to bidding – the leader might have hit partner's 5 card suit).  If 7 or more then 3 cards is a bit more likely.  As you count out their shape during the hand, the actual count will be obvious.

**Why does the Rule of 11 Work?**
A suit has 13 cards. The lowest is the 2. (Think: face value 2, rank 1) The highest is the A.  The A is card 14. (Think face value 14, rank 13). Why 14? The 10 is face value 10, rank 9.  The Jack is face value 11, rank 10, the Queen is face value 12 rank 11.  The King is face value 13, rank 12. The Ace is higher than the K.

Use face because it costs no memory or thought. Note the 2 has 14-2 or 12 cards higher.  The Jack has 14-11 or 3 cards higher, etc.  When the opening leader leads 4$^{th}$ best, there are 3 cards higher than the spot led. **That leaves 14-3 = 11 cards higher than the spot led in the remaining 3 hands.**    That's where we get the **Rule of 11.**

What about **3$^{rd}$ and 5$^{th}$ best** leads? Extending the same logic, leading from a 5 card suit means 14 - 4 = 10 cards higher left in the other 3 hands.  Leading from a 3 card suit means 14-2 = 12 cards higher in the other 3 hands.  (You have to choose which holding the leader has). Hence the Rule of 10 or 12 against this opening lead approach.

**Learning Points**
1) Take time to apply the Rule of 11 (or 10/12) to the opening lead before playing mechanically.  You might just find a better play.
2) User the Rules of 11 (10/12) whether defending or declaring.
3) When leading 4$^{th}$ best, the lead of the 2 (or 3 with the 2 in view; or 4 with the 2 and 3 in view) indicates a 4 card suit if a true lead.
4) Use the Rule of 11 to make smart plays in 3$^{rd}$ seat after partner's opening lead.
5) Use the Rule of 10 or 12 against when facing 3$^{rd}$ of 5$^{th}$ best leads.

**Good Books**
Edwin Kantar, <u>Advanced Bridge Defense</u>             Marty Bergen, <u>More Points Schmoints</u>
Mike Lawrence,   <u>How to Read Your Opponent's Cards: The Bridge Experts' Way to Locate Missing High Cards</u>
Eric Jannersten,   <u>Card Reading: The Art of Guessing Right at the Bridge Table</u>
Marshall Miles,   <u>Inferences at Bridge</u>

*Keywords: Rule of 11, Rule of 10 or 12*