

Article 19 Odds and Even Card Splits

Odds and Evens

When playing a contract how do you expect the missing cards in a suit to split? A rough rule of thumb is that *“an odd number of cards are more likely to split evenly whereas an even number of cards break oddly”*

So 7 missing cards most probably split 4:3, 5 probably split 3:2 and 3 split 2:1.

6 cards are more likely to split oddly i.e. 4:2 rather than 3:3 and 4 cards more likely to be 3:1 rather than 2:2. Does this seem strange? The reason is that there are 2 ways of an even number of cards splitting 4:2 and 3:1 e.g. 4 on one side and 2 on the other and vice versa, whereas there is only one way of them splitting 3:3 or 2:2.

With 2 cards the split is marginally in favour of 1:1 (52%) as against 2:0 (48%).

The odds for different card splits are:

Six	Five	Four	Three
3:3 (36%)	3:2 (68%)	2:2 (40%)	2:1 (78%)
4:2 (48%)	4:1 (28%)	3:1 (50%)	3:0 (22%)
5:1 (15%)	5:0 (4%)	4:0 (10%)	
6:0 (1%)			

It is important at to recognise that this is based on there being no obvious information from the bidding or play. These can usually give you clues as to the most probable split and their distribution.

If an opponent leads a 2 against your NT this suggests that he has a 4333 distribution as if he had two four card suits, then thee other is more likely to be stronger and if he had a five card suit then he would have led a higher card. Equally had opponent led the 2 and then shown out in the second round of another suit then this suggests he had a 4441 distribution as he would have preferred a higher card lead from a 5-card suit.

Understanding the probability and likelihood of splits can often help you decide the line of play of play in a contract, such as the hand below.

	♠ A952	
	♥ AK10	
	♦ 1082	
	♣ 763	
♠ K108		♠ Q
♥ Q7532		♥ 9864
♦ 74		♦ A965
♣ QJ9		♣ K1042
	♠ J7643	
	♥ J	
	♦ KQJ3	
	♣ A85	

Bidding

S	W	N	E
1♠	p	4♠ (1)	p

Lead ♣Q

(1) Good controls (quick tricks). Ambitious since really three-and- half spades.

You win the first trick with the ♣A and now have to decide the line of play.

Line 1: If you lead the ♥J and take the ♥AK and discard a losing ♣5 on the second heart. If the spades split 2:2 you will make the contract as you only lose a ♠, ♦A and a ♣. However, if they do not split 2:2 you will **go back 1 trick**.

Line 2: If you lead the ♥J and let it run if not covered and it holds you can discard the two losing clubs on the ♥AK and only lose 2 trump tricks even if they split 3:1. Finding the ♥Q in West has a 50% chance (it can be in either hand) whereas a 2:2 trump split is less likely as 4 cards are less likely to split evenly.