

When faced with an opening lead against a suit contract, few defenders can resist leading a singleton in a side suit. At times it can be very effective, but not always.

When trying to determine whether or not to lead a singleton, there are two very important factors to consider:

1. Can I get partner on lead to give me the ruff?
2. Will I have any trumps in my hand by the time partner gets the lead?

Of course, if partner holds the ace of your short suit, neither issue will be a problem. When the opponents hold that card however, you will have a lot of work to do. With that in mind, if you have a singleton in a suit partner has opened or overcalled, it stands out as a strong candidate for your opening lead.

The lead is so popular, that if you decide to lead an Ace in a different suit, (even if it is from Ace-King), and then shift to your singleton, you run the risk that partner will return your first suit, even though you wanted a ruff in the second. Many experienced players follow the ancient rule: **“If you don’t lead it at trick one, it’s not a singleton”**.

For obvious reasons, this is not always true, but our goal as a good defender is to make life as easy as possible for partner, and partner is far more likely to recognise a singleton led at trick one than one led at trick two. Okay, so we agree that leading a singleton in partner’s suit is generally a good idea. But what about when it is NOT partner’s suit?

If partner has not bid a suit then leading a singleton is likely to be effective when it is in an **unbid** suit, there is a good chance partner has the ace, or some strength, hopefully partner can gain the lead and lead it back before declarer draws all the trumps.

What about when it is one of the suits bid by the opponents? Now it is far less clear. When you lead a singleton in a suit bid by the opponents it is quite likely that the opponents will hold the top cards in that suit. It is probably a suit that the opponents will eventually want to develop, and your lead will help them to place the unseen spots and honours. For example, if you lead an 8, declarer will almost certainly assume the 9 is held by partner if it is in neither his hand nor dummy’s. If declarer is able to draw trumps, your short suit lead will not only help him play that suit to its maximum advantage, but it may also give up a key tempo in establishing tricks in the defense’s best suit(s).

Therefore, holding a control (an ace or a king) in the trump suit should be a key component in deciding whether or not the short suit lead will be effective.

Another major thing to consider is whether or not the defender with the short suit may be giving up a natural trump trick with the ruff. Also, if the defender has four or more trumps, it is usually more effective to play a forcing defense (forcing declarer to ruff YOUR long suit), and eventually lose control of the hand, than to attempt to get a ruff or two yourself.

Therefore avoid leading a singleton when you have no surplus trumps to use for ruffing (eg QJ3) you will be doing declarer's work by shortening your trumps

One more reason NOT to lead a singleton is against a voluntarily bid small slam if you hold an ace. Partner can not possibly have the ace and you will probably be helping declarer by placing the missing honours in partners hand

Summary: A singleton lead is effective when

- 1 it is partners suit
- 2 it is an unbid suit
- 3 when we hold the trump ace or king

Not a good idea

- 1 it is in a suit bid by the opponents
- 2 if you hold 4 or more trumps
- 3 against a small slam if you hold an ace in another suit