

RUFFS BY DEFENSE by Maritha Pottenger

As defenders, getting trump tricks, or giving ruffs to partner, requires considerable attention. You must decide whether or not the lead of a singleton or doubleton is likely to pay off for your side. (If it does not pay off in a trump trick, you have probably lost an important tempo when you should have been attacking another suit.)

The best time to lead a singleton is when your hand is very weak and you have trump control (e.g., Axx in trumps or Kxx behind the opening bidder). When you are weak, it is much more likely that your partner will have an Ace (thus, a quick entry with which to give you a ruff).

If you have a relatively weak hand and trump control, even the lead of a doubleton can pay off for your side.

If your partner leads a card that is an obvious singleton from the bidding (perhaps dummy bid the suit and no sane partner wants to help Declarer set up a side suit), if you cannot take that trick, your duty is to **play a card that shows—by the size of your card—where your side entry is** so that partner can get to your hand for a ruff. Suppose an auction goes 1C on your right, pass by you, 1S on your left, pass by partner, 2S on your right and 4S on your left, and partner leads the 2 of clubs with AKQxx showing up in dummy. No matter what club is played from dummy, you should play your LOWEST club if you have the Ace of diamonds and your HIGHEST club if you have the Ace of hearts.

If you suspect that **partner has led a doubleton** (from the size of the card and from your guesses about the distribution based on the auction) and **you have only the Ace of that suit** as any quick entry, you should **DUCK the first trick, but signal with another HIGH card** (encouraging) so that partner—if s/he has trump control—will play that doubleton suit one more time and THEN you can give partner a ruff. If you play the Ace at trick one and return the suit immediately, partner will not be able to get to your hand later for a ruff. (Of course, if you are wrong and partner has a singleton instead of a doubleton, you'll be in hot water.)

If you can tell from the bidding that partner probably has a singleton or a void, lead that suit, particularly if you have trump control and will be able to lead it again. If you do not have trump control, **lead a card in that suit that shows partner—based on the size of the card you've led—where your quick, side entry is in order to give partner a ruff**. Example: 1H on your right, pass by you; 2C on your left; pass by partner; 3C on your right; 4H on your left. If you have 5 clubs, partner is probably void! Lead a club. If you have 4 clubs, partner probably has a singleton. If you have 4 or 5 clubs and trump control, lead a middling club. If you have 4 or 5 clubs and the Ace of spades, lead your HIGHEST club. If you have 4 or 5 clubs and the Ace of diamonds, lead your LOWEST club.

When you do give partner a ruff any time in the hand, the size of the card you play for partner to trump tells partner where your entry (or possible entry) is to give him/her another ruff. A HIGH

card asks partner to lead back the HIGHER of the two suits involved (trumps & the suit being ruffed do not count). A LOW card asks partner to lead back the LOWER of the two suits in question. This is standard **suit preference** signals.