

Doubleton Leads

Doubletons are the worst lead in bridge! Lead them ONLY if in partner's suit!

Some authors recommend leading doubletons, but one author said, "Lead a doubleton ONLY if it's a singleton!"

The auction has ended and you are on lead. What now?

There was once a strong prejudice against doubleton leads but on many hands a doubleton may be the best lead. As always, it is important to tune into the bidding:

Opener	Responder
1♠	2♥
2NT	4♥

You are on lead holding ♠ K 8 4 2 ♥ A 6 3 ♦ 10 5 ♣ 7 5 3 2

The situation is particularly unpromising because that ♠K is probably in the wrong place. In short, it looks as if the hand will play well for declarer. Given time he may be able to set up the spade suit. Don't give him time. Attack with the ♦10 (**always the top from a doubleton**). If you are very lucky partner will have the ♦AQ over the opener's king. You are playing through the strong hand, the hand that has advertised something in diamonds by its 2NT rebid. So, you are unlikely to do much damage.

You may ask, how will partner know whether I have led from a doubleton or a singleton? Even if he has the ♦A and leads back the suit, I can't ruff. And how shall I put him in afterwards? The answer is, partner can, and must, work it out. Sometimes he will get it wrong but more often than not he will get there. Let us switch to partner's chair and see why;

We see the ♦10 glide across the table, dummy comes down with:

♠ A J 10 6 ♥ K J ♦ K Q 9 7 ♣ Q 6 4

In our hand we hold ♠ Q 7 5 3 ♥ 8 4 ♦ A 8 2 ♣ K J 9 8

Well, is that ten a singleton or doubleton lead? Seven diamonds stare us in the face, four on the table and three in our hand. Partner's card is the eighth. So if it is a singleton Declarer must have five, and the bidding makes that distinctly unlikely, He has shown at least six hearts. If he had five diamonds as well he might have said something about it.

Could it not be the top of three or four? To which the answer is: hardly. West cannot have a sequence, because the nine is on the table. If he held four diamonds without the nine, he would have started with the smallest, not the ten. He may have three, but then no harm is done by holding up the ace.

Another example:

♠ Q 3

♥ 8 7 5

♦ A Q 9 6 4

♣ J 10 3

♠ K 6 4

♥ J 6

♦ K J 10

♣ A 8 7 4 2

West North East South

1♣ 1♠

Pass 2♦ Pass 2♥

All Pass

Partner leads the ♣9. Is that a singleton?

Declarer has shown at least nine cards in spades and hearts, for it is most unlikely that he overcalled 1♠ with a four card suit missing the ♠KQ. It is most improbable that he has ♣K Q 6 5 as well. And if he has not, then the lead can not be a singleton. If partner started with three clubs, holding up the ace will cost nothing, and if he started with a doubleton, it may gain a trick.

Not every situation will lend itself to accurate diagnosis, but it is better to have guessed and lost, than never to have guessed at all!

If partner leads a singleton and you have the ace then there is not much to think about, take the trick and give him a ruff. But if the lead is from a doubleton, it won't do. Partner can't ruff yet, and it is up to you to make sure that it is your trick when he can ruff on the third round. The ace of his doubleton suit ensures accessibility **so hold it up if you decide that lead is from a doubleton.**

So in the situation above, having deduced that the ♣9 is no singleton, do not play the ace, play an encouraging card (high or low, depending on your system, partner will be watching) so partner knows to lead a club again when on lead next.

Leading from doubletons should not become a hobby, and down the list of our favourite opening leads, but it can be a useful opening sometimes.

When should you NOT lead a doubleton?

Leading a singleton or doubleton when you have 4 trumps. The trumps you hold are going to make life difficult for the Declarer when they are drawing trumps and the 4th one may well win a trick, so why do you need a ruff with a naturally winning trick?