



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(499) Getting Our Ruffs**

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Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

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#### **General**

One of the most frustrating situations in bridge is when we are defending a hand and have the opportunity to get a ruff (or give partner a ruff) but fail to do so. It feels as if we have just thrown a free trick away and this can often lead to frustration and further misdefense – giving away even more tricks because we are focused on our previous mistake. Let's look at how we can do better at giving partner their ruffs and how we can help partner give us our ruffs when defending suit contracts.

#### **Opening Leads**

When we have a singleton in a side suit, we are often looking for a ruff. One way we can try to help partner know that we have a singleton is to lead it on opening lead. An old saying in bridge (which isn't always true, but is a reasonable guideline) is that "If partner doesn't lead a singleton, then they don't have one!" So, if we have a singleton, one of the best ways to get our ruff is to simply lead it!

Another way to help partner with giving us a ruff is to strip them of another suit (that they may be tempted to lead) before we play our singleton.

#### *Example 1*

♠ 762

♥ 985

♦ AKQ

♣ KQJ7

♠ 853

♥ AKQ632

♦ 876

♣ 5

We lead the ♥A. When partner plays the ♥T, showing 2 cards (or a singleton), we cash a second ♥ (extracting partner's last ♥), and then shift to a ♣.

*Advanced Note: We can cash ♥A then ♥Q before shifting, just to emphasize that we would like a ♣ returned!*



There is another example in which partner may be able to work out that our lead seems like a singleton. This is when we lead a spot card (not an honor sequence) in another suit when partner has bid a suit. We may choose not to lead partner's suit if we have a great holding in a side suit, like KQJT. But if we lead a spot card, then partner knows this is not the case. There are two main reasons we may choose to lead a spot card in another suit instead of leading partner's suit:

- First is that we have a holding in partner's suit like Axx (the Ace with some length; with Ax we may lead that suit attempting to get a ruff if partner has the King) and we want to save our Ace to try to capture declarer's honor in partner's suit.
- The second and even more common reason for not leading partner's suit in this situation is that we are leading a singleton!

*Note: Of course, one other reason for not leading partner's suit is that we are void, but hopefully partner can work out when that is the situation.*

### Partner, Was That a Singleton You Led?

When partner leads a card that may be a singleton but we cannot tell and it could be dangerous to return this suit if we are wrong, then we are in a difficult position that partner would really like for us to get right!

#### Example 2

♦ KQJ95

♣ 754

♦ AT64

♣ AK93

Partner's opening lead is the ♦8. Here we would like to have a way for partner to let us know whether this is a singleton or something else like a doubleton or top of nothing. The classic way to find this out is to cash a winner (like an Ace) in another suit. If partner has led a singleton, they will discourage in this new suit, telling us to return to their original lead and give them their ruff. If partner has not led a singleton, then they will encourage us to continue this suit. They will encourage this second suit even without an honor in it, so that we do not make the mistake of returning their original lead, thinking it was a singleton.

In this example, we win the ♦A and at trick 2 cash the ♣K. If partner discourages (say playing the standard carding ♣2) then we return to ♦, giving partner a ruff. They will then return to our hand with a ♣ and we can give them another ♦ ruff.



## Suit Preference Signals

When we know that we are giving partner a ruff, it is easy to get excited and do so unthinkingly, but we need to take a moment and proceed carefully. After partner ruffs they will be on lead and looking for a way to get back to our hand to get another ruff (or they may just need to know which suit to exit with). We can let partner know which suit to return by giving a suit preference signal in the suit that we are leading for them to ruff. Clearly partner cannot return the suit they are ruffing (so it is not considered) and we ignore the opponents' trump suit. This leaves us with the two other suits to consider. If we play a low card for partner to ruff we are asking for the lower-ranking of these two suits to be returned and if we play a high card for partner to ruff we are asking for the higher-ranking of these two suits to be returned. Partner should keep in mind if we actually had enough cards to choose between (sometimes we will only have one card to play to give them a ruff).

### *Example 3*

♠ KQ5  
♥ KQJT  
♦ 873  
♣ 762

♠ 7  
♥ A9752  
♦ 9642  
♣ A85

Partner leads a low ♥ against a 4♠ contract. We win the ♥A at trick 1 and play the ♥2 at trick 2, giving partner their ruff and telling them to play a ♣, not a ♦, to return to our hand. We win the ♣A and then give partner a second ruff (with the ♥7, since we have no preference for what they return at this point), setting the contract by taking the first 4 tricks.



## Trump Suit Preference Signals

Another way we can help partner know that we have led a singleton and that we would like a ruff is by using our spot cards in the trump suit to direct the defense.

### Example 4

♠ 7632	
♥ AKJ	
♦ AK	
♣ 9642	
♠ T98	♠ A
♥ 8	♥ 97532
♦ QT954	♦ J862
♣ AQ53	♣ KT7
♠ KQJ54	
♥ QT64	
♦ 73	
♣ J8	

In this example, we lead our stiff ♥. If partner cannot win trick 1 to give us an immediate ruff, then we hope they are able to win a trump trick before we are out of trump and give us a ruff later. We use our spot cards in the trump suit to tell partner which suit to return. This is called *Trump Suit Preference*. Here we play the ♠T on the first round of ♠ to confirm our ♥ was a singleton and we want a ruff.

On this hand, trick 1 is won in dummy with the ♥A. Partner wins trick 2 with the ♠A, as we play the ♠T. Partner should know that we have several ♠ to choose between (since they are short in ♠) and thus this ♠T must be a trump suit preference signal. Partner now gives us a ruff with the ♥2 – telling us to return a ♣. We underlead our ♣ honors to partner's ♣K and get our second ruff. We then cash our ♣A and even try our ♣Q (which declarer finally ruffs).

## An Unusual Play

One other way to help partner defend best and give us a ruff is make an unusual play of jumping up with our honor (like an Ace) in the second seat and then shifting to an unusually strong suit in the dummy.

For example, if declarer leads a low ♦ from the dummy at trick 2 and we play our ♦A in the second seat (not capturing any honors), this should seem strange to partner. If we next shift to one of dummy's strong suits (like into a ♣ holding like KQJT) then this should alert partner to the fact that we are playing a singleton and want our ♣ ruff. We would not make such strange plays without a reason and partner should trust us and return a ♣, giving us a ruff!



## Conclusion

When you (or partner) lead a singleton, it is important to do everything you can to ensure you get a ruff (or as many ruffs as possible). However, if you think partner has led a singleton and you are mistaken, then returning their led suit (especially into a strong holding in the dummy) can be a disaster. It is important for you and partner to use every tool you can, including Attitude, Suit Preference, and Trump Suit Preference Signals, to make sure you get your all your ruffs. Use all the tools available to get all your tricks!