

## WHEN TO TAKE AN ACE

One of the hardest things in bridge is knowing the right time to take your ace. We've all had the experience of a low card being led in front of our ace, ducking and finding declarer started with a singleton. Or conversely grabbing an ace too fast on small cards and allowing declarer to make extra tricks. What can we do in this situation? We should start with what we *shouldn't* do:

**The worst thing you can do is pause and then play low.** Declarer now knows where the ace is and has the advantage that it hasn't taken a trick yet. This leads us to rule 1:

**If you have an ace, think well ahead of time what you are going to do if a little card is led past your nose in the suit.** This is a preliminary decision which can be changed if and when you have more information.

Classic signs that declarer is more likely to have a singleton and it might be better to take your ace now are:

1. Declarer has pre-empted in a suit,
2. Declarer has bid 2 suits showing a 5-4 shape and is playing another suit.

Another warning sign that an ace might need to be taken early is a long suit in dummy that appears to be on the verge of running.

Conversely, if nothing in the bidding has suggested declarer has a shapely hand or declarer has actually bid NTs at an early stage, I'm much more inclined to duck unless I would be killing an honour. Another thing I have noticed is if declarer has a singleton or void in one suit, it is extremely rare that they have a singleton in another suit.

Dealer: W

Vul: NS

	♠ 1042	
	♥ Q6	
	♦ A93	
	♣ K10743	
♠ K		♠ J98763
♥ AK1075432		♥ 8
♦ 105		♦ KJ72
♣ J5		♣ A6
	♠ AQ5	
	♥ J9	
	♦ Q864	
	♣ Q982	

West opened the bidding with a 4H pre-empt and that was the final contract. Opening lead 4C.

This hand occurred at the club on Friday 27 September 2019. There were 2 ace decisions to be made. I was the South hand and my ace decision was easy. If a low spade comes off the table, there is nothing to be gained by ducking and a lot potentially to be lost. If West has a protected king they are going to score it so I should take my SA immediately in case declarer is being sneaky with a singleton king (as was the case).

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4H by West.

North has a much harder decision with the DA. The pre-empt by West has dramatically increased the chances that declarer is short in one or more side suits. However, I would still be initially inclined to duck in diamonds if a small one was led from West. If West has the DQ, I can get it on the way back. If South has the DQ, West might misguess.

However, North's task is utterly clear – North must work out what declarer's shape is (and thus how many diamonds are in the West hand) as fast as possible.

At my table, declarer ducked the club to my CQ. This wasn't a good move as it helped us count the hand. Suspicious that declarer was trying to ruff a club in dummy, I switched to a trump.

Declarer drew trumps in 2 rounds. When the defenders' HQ and HJ bang heads on the second round, both defenders should realise West had **8 hearts**.

West crossed to the CA and led a sneaky S3 and I flew with the SA. Declarer's SK showed that he started with only **1 spade**.

I led a third round of clubs which West ruffed, showing West started with only **2 clubs**.

1 spade, 8 hearts and 2 clubs means declarer has 2 diamonds and North definitely should duck with the DA. Now declarer has a guess to make their contract.

Every declarer in hearts (20 in total) made 10 or more tricks on this hand suggesting the defence around the room was less than optimal.