

Against your suit contract, the defenders lead a side-suit at trick 1 in which you hold a doubleton Ax and dummy holds two or more small cards. Do you win the first trick with the Ace or do you hold up for one round? Does it matter?

It all depends on the rest of the hand, of course. If you will be able to discard your loser in the suit later on then you will win the first trick. If you can see that you won't be able to get rid of the loser, it might be better to allow the defenders to win the first trick. A recent game contract at Shoreham demonstrated this point perfectly:

J9754
96
843
AK8

A	82
A1084	QJ752
KQ106	J952
10653	92

KQ1063
K3
A7
QJ74

West led the King of diamonds against South's contract of Four Spades. At the table, declarer won the first trick with the Ace and led the King of spades at trick 2. West won with the Ace and then found the remarkable play of underleading his Queen of diamonds at trick 3, his six of diamonds lead won by East with the Jack. East continued with the Queen of hearts and declarer was soon one down, losing one trump, one diamond and two hearts.

Despite West's brilliant defence (although it wouldn't have been very brilliant if declarer, rather than East, had held the Jack of diamonds!) declarer didn't think his play through properly. Look at the difference it makes if declarer decides to hold up his Ace of diamonds at trick 1. Say West continues with a second diamond at trick 2 (as good as anything else). Declarer wins with the Ace and leads the King of spades as before. West wins but cannot give East the lead in diamonds because declarer is now void. Whatever West does, declarer will draw the remaining trump and discard one of dummy's heart losers on the fourth round of clubs. Ten tricks and game made. Once declarer refuses to win the first trick, West can never get East on lead to play a heart through declarer's King.

So can Four Spades ever be beaten? In practice almost certainly not, but in theory, yes. However, it would require an even more brilliant defence. Either West leads the ten of diamonds at trick 1 and East overtakes with the Jack, or West leads the six of diamonds and East plays the nine! Declarer cannot afford to hold up his Ace of diamonds now because East will switch to a heart and the defenders will be able to win the first four tricks. After declarer wins the first trick and leads a trump, West wins and can now lead his lowest remaining diamond over to East's highest remaining diamond! Surely there isn't a player in the world that would find that defence ... is there?

Enjoy your bridge.