

16. Defensive play – signaling, part 2

Refresher – there are three kinds of signal defenders can use to give information to each other during the play of the cards:

Attitude Count Suit preference

The first part of the signaling series dealt with Attitude signaling when partner leads a side suit against a trump contract. When partner leads an honor (top of a sequence) and you follow suit with the highest card you can afford, you signal encouragement to continue the suit. When you play your lowest, you are suggesting that a switch to a new suit might be profitable.

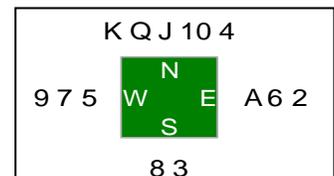
If there is a chance of getting a ruff in the suit that partner leads, it is often good to signal encouragement – play high-low. However, you should not try for a ruff if it would take away a natural defensive trump trick. Rather make declarer work harder to pull your trumps. Example: holding QJx of trumps, don't look for a ruff. You are very likely to make one of those trumps anyway.

<u>W on lead</u>	<u>Dummy</u>	<u>East (you)</u>
♣KQ843	♣J76	♣A2

♣K led by partner. Defending a heart contract, what card should you play, sitting East?

Count signal

Most players (other than experts) only use count signals when following suit to a lead by declarer or dummy. In other words, do not give a count signal when partner leads a suit, give attitude. We will look at just one, which could come up in either notrump or a suit contract. When declarer has a threatening suit in dummy, but a defender holds the ace of that suit, he should win the trick when declarer plays her last card of the suit. To signal that you hold an odd number of cards, play your lowest first. To signal an even number, play the highest you can afford, then your lowest. Declarer leads this suit. East needs to win the ace at trick 2, but needs count from West. West should play the 5 (his lowest) showing an odd number. East can then work out that declarer has a doubleton.



Suit preference

The simplest example comes when you are giving partner a ruff. You (West) lead the ♥A. Partner plays the 9. You follow with the ♥K, partner completes the high-low, and now you play a 3rd round of hearts for partner to ruff. Play the ♥2, saying "Partner, I have an entry in the **lower ranking** side suit, i.e. clubs". If your entry was in diamonds, you would play the ♥10 on the 3rd round, asking partner to lead the **higher ranking** side suit. In our example, if East doesn't get the message to return a club, and plays instead a diamond or a spade at trick 4, declarer makes her contract with ease by discarding the ♣7 on the ♥J, after drawing trumps.

