

## 15. Defensive play – signaling, part 1

Experts agree (and who am I to argue with them?) that defense is the hardest part of the game. Declarer has many advantages: most of the points (usually); most of the trumps (if there are trumps); and a view of all partnership assets, which gives her more information on which to base her plan of attack. Each defender can only see half of their side's assets – therefore, they can easily end up working at cross purposes as they try to defeat declarer. Signaling is a legitimate way for defenders to communicate with each other, and so, hopefully, to get on the same page with their defensive plans.

There are three main types of defensive signal:

**Attitude:** tells partner whether you want him to continue with the suit that he has led

**Count:** how many cards you have in a suit that has been led

**Suit preference:** which suit you want partner to lead

You can only give one of these signals at a time. Attitude signals are the easiest to learn and apply, and are more common than the other two types. Separately from the three signal **types** (above) there are different signaling **systems**. We will use the **standard** signal system, which is simplest and works well.

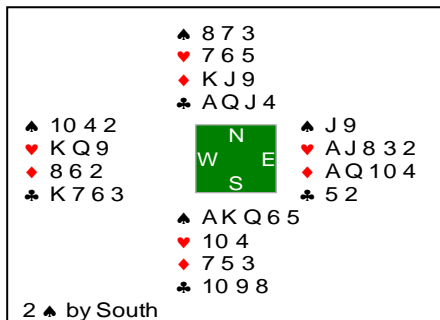
### Attitude signals in suit contracts

When partner leads a high card (usually top of a sequence) in a side suit and you have help for partner in that suit, or simply want him to continue, you can encourage him to keep leading it by playing the **highest card you can afford** – i.e. without losing a likely later trick in the suit. You would often encourage when partner has led an honor and you have an “equal” honor (e.g. if you have Qxx, and partner has led the A from AKx(x)). Another common situation where you encourage is when you have a doubleton and partner leads the A from AKx(x). Now you plan to ruff the third round. Let's look at some very simple examples, where W leads a side suit. Mostly, you are sitting E.

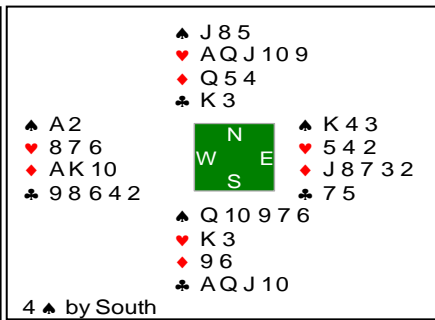
<u>W on lead</u>	<u>Dummy</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>Declarer</u>	
AK843	Q76	92	J105	East plays high-low (echo), hoping to ruff.
KQ94	632	plays <b>7</b>	plays 5	You are W and lead the K. What next?
(in trying to decide whether partner is encouraging, look for cards <b>lower</b> than partner's)				
KQ94	632	10 <b>87</b>	A <b>J5</b>	All the cards lower than East's 7 are on view
AK862	J4	Q <b>95</b>	1073	E has an equal honor, so encourages
A3	QJ109	K <b>854</b>	762	E has an equal honor, the K
AK73	654	Q <b>2</b>	J1098	Normally, when the queen is doubleton, do not start a high-low. It is likely to waste a trick, as it would in this case.

When partner has led the A from presumed AKx(x).. holding, there are situations when it is right to play the queen. One is when your queen is singleton, so you had better not revoke. Another is when you also hold the jack:

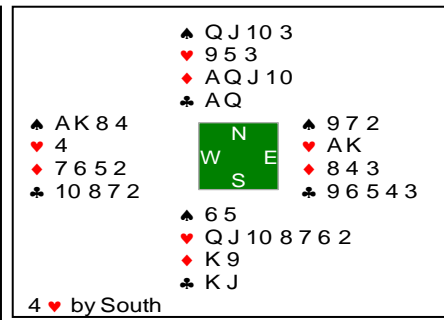
<u>W on lead</u>	<u>Dummy</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>Declarer</u>	
AK73	654	QJ2	1098	You are telling partner that it is ok to lead low at trick two, you will win it with the jack. Perhaps partner would like you to lead a new suit through declarer.
AK973	J42	Q2	1086	Play Q – partner knows you don't have the jack, so Q must be singleton or doubleton. You can ruff the 3 <sup>rd</sup> round, so playing the Q is safe.



Playing a low (discouraging) card doesn't necessarily mean you don't have help in that suit for partner. It could just mean you want a switch to a different suit. E/W have bid hearts, but S steals the contract at 2S. W leads the ♥K. Plan the play for E. Hint: your side needs 6 tricks.



What do you play here, when West leads the ♦A? If you choose the wrong card, it could cost you a national championship!



West leads the ♠A against South's 4 heart contract. What should East play at trick one?

## Summary

When partner leads a side suit, a high card encourages him to continue with the suit.

A low card discourages continuation with that suit.

You should encourage with help in the suit, a chance to ruff, or if you fear a switch to another suit.

Discourage if continuing would lose a trick, or if you have another suit you want led.

Use the **highest card you can afford** when signaling encouragement.

To work out whether partner is signaling high or low, look for **lower** cards that appear on the first trick.