

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.

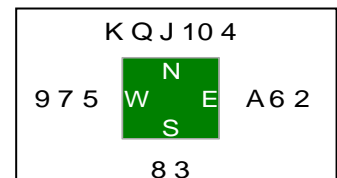
If there is a chance of getting a ruff in the suit that partner leads, it is often good to signal encouragement – play high-low. However, you should not try for a ruff if it would take away a natural defensive trump trick. Rather make declarer work harder to pull your trumps. Example: holding QJx of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

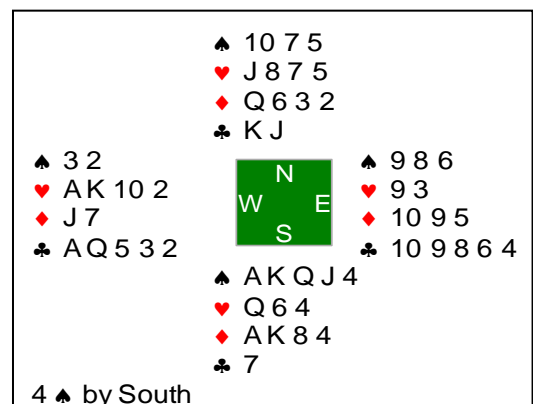
Count signal

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.



Signaling with Discards

A discard is a card you play when you can't follow suit. It matters not whether partner led the suit or declarer led the suit. A discard is a powerful way to send a signal to partner. Again, there are different systems, but we will use standard discards.

Discarding a high card asks partner to lead that suit when she can. Discarding a low card tells partner that you don't need or want her to lead that suit. You should **not** discard a high card if it will cost you a trick. After a 1NT – 3NT auction, West leads the ♠5. South wins and leads another spade to West's ace, and East must discard. East wants a diamond switch, but can't afford to play any card in that suit. So he plays the ♥3, denying an interest in hearts. West switches to the ♦7, dummy puts up the king, and East must encourage with the 8. When West gets in again with the ♣K, she leads another diamond and East takes three more tricks.

♠ A 8 7 5 4 ♥ J 10 2 ♦ 7 4 2 ♣ K 10	<table style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 80px; height: 80px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 9 6 3 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ Q J 8 2 ♠ 2 ♥ 9 6 5 3 ♦ A J 8 6 ♣ 7 6 5 3
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3 N by South											

If you lead a suit against a notrump contract, and realize that it was a bad choice, take your first chance to discard from that suit. Partner will realize you don't want her to return that suit. You are sitting West and lead the ♠4 against the 3NT contract. When partner plays the 10 (her highest) you realize that there is no future in spades. You want a heart switch. Declarer now plays the ♣K and another club. Discard a spade! Hopefully when partner wins the ♣Q she will push the ♥J through declarer and you will get four tricks in that suit, to set the contract. If you don't throw a spade, she will dutifully lead that suit back to you and declarer will take home nine tricks.

♠ J 8 5 4 3 ♥ A Q 9 8 ♦ 8 6 2 ♣ 2	<table style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 80px; height: 80px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 9 7 ♥ 6 5 4 ♦ J 9 3 ♣ A J 9 7 4 ♠ 10 6 2 ♥ J 10 3 ♦ Q 10 7 5 ♣ Q 10 5 ♠ A K Q ♥ K 7 2 ♦ A K 4 ♣ K 8 6 3
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Summary

When **partner** leads an honor, top of a sequence, signal **ATTITUDE**. A relatively high card encourages partner to keep leading the same suit. A low card suggests switching to a new suit.

When **declarer** leads a suit, especially at notrump with a threatening suit in dummy, defenders should signal **COUNT**. This may enable one defender to take a trick in that suit at the right time.

When you are giving partner a **ruff**, and have another entry to give partner a second ruff, signal **SUIT PREFERENCE** to show partner in which side suit your entry lies.

DISCARDS are used to encourage (high card) or discourage (low card) the lead of a particular suit. Do not encourage if it will cost a trick in that suit. Rather discard low cards in the other suits.