

SIGNALS

In order to find the best defence against a particular contract the defenders must be able to exchange information about the strength and shape of their respective hands. This is particularly true if their side has been silent throughout the auction. To transmit information a partnership needs to develop an understanding as to the meaning of the play of certain cards, rather than simply following suit with the lowest available card. This agreement constitutes a system of signals, whereby you are able to gain a picture of the strength and shape of your partner's hand and, therefore, an approximation of the strength and shape of the declarer's hand.

Be wary, however! An easy trap for the inexperienced to fall into is to attempt to give signals at every opportunity, blithely unaware that they are also advising an alert declarer of the best way to play the contract. There is absolutely no point to giving signals to the declarer, since you should be attempting to give the declarer problems to solve rather than making life easier.

Attitude Signals.

The simplest form of signal is to play a high card on partner's lead of an honour to indicate that you want partner to continue the suit and a low card if you do not like the suit. The advantage of this form of signalling, known as 'Attitude' or HELD (High Encourage – Low Discourage), is that partner may well be able to draw the correct inference on your play of a low card and switch to a second suit early enough to defeat the contract.

Example 1

| | | |
|---|------------|-------------|
| | | N |
| | ♠ | 7 |
| | ♥ | 7 3 |
| | ♦ | K Q 9 6 5 2 |
| | ♣ | K Q 10 3 |
| | W | |
| ♠ | K 10 6 5 2 | |
| ♥ | Q 10 8 4 | |
| ♦ | 7 4 | |
| ♣ | J 6 | |

| N | E | S | W |
|----|----|-----------|----|
| | 1♥ | P | 2♥ |
| 3♦ | 4♥ | 5♦ | P |
| P | 5♥ | All pass. | |

This aggressive auction is typical of duplicate bridge, when one pair (e.g. North/South) are non-vulnerable against vulnerable. East will always have a difficult choice over 5♦ – should he double and take the money or should he push on to 5♥ and hope for the best? Whichever option he chooses could be the wrong choice, which is the ideal position to put him in. You will always know when you have got your opponents on the hook, since whatever final choice is made it is always followed by a sigh of irritation!

South leads out the ♦A. Which card do you play? Your instinct might well be to play the ♦9, encouraging partner to continue with a second round of the suit. However this is virtually guaranteed to be a mistake. Partner was prepared to raise your 3♦ overcall to 5♦. While he may have done this with just three-card support, it is very unlikely that East would have bid 5♥ if he had two small ♦s in his hand. He would have shrugged his shoulders and doubled for penalties instead. East is also very unlikely to have risked a vulnerable 5♥ unless he thought the contract would have some play, particularly since his partner has made the minimum raise to 2♥ over his opening bid. Therefore it should be clear that East *does not have three top losers*. He must hold both the ♠A and the ♣A for his bidding, as well as the top trumps. If he holds the ♠Q as well then the contract is likely to make, since the ♠ suit can be established to dispose of any losing ♣s. Thus you must play your partner for the ♠Q and hopefully the ♠J as well. Now the contract will always be beaten provided declarer holds three or four ♠s and at least two ♣s, so long as partner switches to a ♣ at trick two. Therefore you must *discourage* a ♦ continuation by playing the ♦2 under partner's ♦A. Partner should now be able to find the ♣ switch without too much trouble, especially if he does hold the ♠Q.

With a full view of all four hands it should be obvious that 5♥ cannot be beaten unless South switches to a ♣ at trick two. On any other play the declarer will have the time to draw the trumps and knock out the ♠ guard, thus setting up dummy's fifth ♠ to discard his losing ♣. South should not get this switch wrong, since he knows from the auction that his partner has a six-card ♦ suit.

| | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|---|---|-------------|
| ♠ | K 10 6 5 2 | | N | ♠ | A 9 8 4 |
| ♥ | Q 10 8 4 | W | E | ♥ | A K J 9 5 2 |
| ♦ | 7 4 | | S | ♦ | 3 |
| ♣ | J 6 | | | ♣ | A 5 |

Example 2

| | | | |
|---------|----------|---|--|
| | K J 10 5 | N | |
| A Q 6 3 | W | | |
| 10 9 4 | | | |
| 9 4 | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|-----|-----------|-----|
| | N | E | S | W |
| | | 1 ♠ | P | 3 ♠ |
| P | | 4 ♠ | All pass. | |

South leads the ♣A. It should be obvious that three quick tricks are available to the defence (2 ♣s and the ♦A) and the contract will depend on declarer's guess in the trump suit. Will he finesse the ♠J or will he run it?

There is one additional chance, however. If you deceive partner about the position in the ♣ suit, you may induce declarer to go wrong in trumps. Therefore under the ♣A you should encourage with the ♣8, following with the ♣3 when partner plays the ♣K. Partner will probably play you for a doubleton and continue with a third round. Hopefully declarer will also think that you have a doubleton and will elect to ruff higher than necessary in the attempt to locate the ♠Q. Whether declarer ruffs with the ♠K or ♠J (or ♠10) will make no difference to the final result, since he must have at least the ♦K Q, as well as the ♥K for his opening bid. Therefore he has a certain ♦ loser unless he has precisely a singleton ♥K and a doubleton ♦, in which case he can park his two ♦ losers on the ♥A Q. If declarer does ruff the third round of ♣s high, he will have a certain trump loser. The ♠5 of trumps can be covered by the ♠9, thus forcing the ♠A, and the ♠J (or ♠10) can be covered by the ♠Q, thus promoting the ♠9. Essentially what your play does is to persuade declarer into taking an early *wrong* guess about the trump suit.

The basic flaw with HELD signals is that you may not have the appropriate card with which to make the correct signal. Holding something like 9 8 7 in the suit would make it difficult to discourage continuation, unless your partner is able to read the location of all the lower cards by seeing the dummy and declarer's play to the lead. This illustrates the major problem with any kind of signalling, which is that religiously following such a system tends to generate lazy thinking. How many players would take the trouble to notice that all of the lower cards had been revealed by partner's play of the 7 and that partner may be attempting to discourage rather than encourage? The opposite situation arises also. Holding K J 3 2 in a suit, the play of the 3 on partner's lead of the Ace is not likely to encourage a continuation. On the other hand, the play of the Jack may well cost a trick.

Some players attempt to deal with this by playing 'Reverse Attitude' signals. Thus a continuation is encouraged by the play of a low card and discouraged by the play of a high card. While this does not solve the problem of not always having the right card with which to signal, it does have the benefit of not having to play a high card from four-card suits in order to encourage. With a holding like K 8 3 2, for example, it could be very expensive to play the 8. On the other hand, the play of the 2 cannot possibly cost.

Count Signals

An alternative method of signalling is to give partner the count in a particular suit, either by your response to his opening lead or with your own opening lead.

The usual way of giving partner the count on his lead is to play a high card followed by a lower card on the second round to show an even number of cards in the suit, or a low card followed by a higher card on the second round to show an odd number. Such a signal can be a vital piece of information whenever declarer is trying to set up a long suit in dummy and partner needs to know when to take his trick.

Example 3

[illegible]

South found the good lead of the ♥K and did even better when he continued with the ♥Q after declarer ducked the first round. Declarer took the ♥Ace and switched to the ♠J, winning with the ♠A when North covered with the ♠Q. Declarer then played low to the ♦J.

South must play the $\spadesuit 9$ to give his partner the count. North will now know that he must duck the first round to prevent the suit being established, even though this allows declarer to take a second finesse in \spadesuits . Although the declarer can set up nine tricks at this point (3 \spadesuits , 2 \heartsuits , a \diamond and 3 \clubsuits) he cannot do so without conceding two \clubsuit tricks to South,

who will inevitably establish the second ♥ trick for the defence in time to defeat the contract.

At the table South actually played the ♦5 on the first round of the suit, leading North to suppose that he had started either with a singleton or ♦Q 9 5. If South had the latter, North could safely win the first round of ♦s. Even if the ♣J was an entry, the ♦ suit could not be established. On the other hand, if South had a singleton ♦ then North must duck the first two rounds of ♦s to prevent the suit being established. In the event he decided to duck the first round – and confidently ducked a second round when declarer played low to the ♦Q. His confidence evaporated swiftly when South followed with the ♦9. Now the contract could not be defeated. When the ♦Q held, declarer switched to a low ♣, taken by South with the ♣Q. South played a third round of ♥s to establish a second ♥ trick for the defence. Now declarer cashed the ♣A K and exited with a ♣ to South's ♣10. South could cash his ♥10, but this allowed declarer to dispose of his losing ♠. All South could do was exit with a ♠ to concede the last two tricks to the declarer. Very careless, especially after South's good play at trick two!

When playing count signals there is the danger that your partner may be deceived by your signal and misread the distribution in the suit, taking you to hold two cards when you actually hold three – or vice-versa. For example, if you play the 7 on your partner's opening lead of the Ace, you would usually be showing a doubleton but you could be showing a holding of three cards (i.e. 9 8 7). It is not until the second round of the suit is played that partner receives confirmation of the distribution. Conversely, if you play the 4 or 5 to your partner's Ace, you may be playing the lowest card from a three-card suit or the highest card from a doubleton. You cannot always rely on the declarer to play his lowest card in these circumstances, since he should be trying to muddy the waters as much as possible.

The 'Rule of Fifteen'

Another very common method of signalling distribution is for a partnership to agree the lead of a particular card from a long suit (i.e. third-highest, fourth-highest etc.) Not only does this lead tell partner the minimum number of cards that you hold in the suit, it also enables him to work out how many cards higher than the lead are held by all four hands.

For example, if you have agreed to lead fourth-highest from your longest suit, partner can apply simple arithmetic to work out how many cards higher than the lead are held by the declarer. This sum is commonly described as applying the "Rule of Eleven", but it should

properly be described as applying the “Rule of Fifteen” since variations of the sum can be used for second, third, fourth or *any* highest. The rule works as follows:-

- 1). Subtract the number defining length from 15 (i.e. third highest – 15 - 3 = 12; fourth-highest – 15 - 4 = 11; fifth-highest – 15 - 5 = 10; etc.)
- 2). Subtract the numerical value of the card led from this total (i.e. a 7 is led...)
If this is the third-highest - 7 from 12 = 5.
If this is the fourth-highest - 7 from 11 = 4.
If fifth-highest (unlikely) - 7 from 10 = 3.
- 3). The number you are left with is the number of cards higher than the lead that are held by the other three players (i.e. declarer, dummy and yourself.) Since you can see both dummy’s holding and your own, you now know how many cards higher than the lead are held by the declarer.

To show how this works, we’ll assume that you have agreed to lead third-highest from longest and strongest suits against no-trump contracts. Partner leads the 7 and the dummy holds 10 8 3 2. You hold Q 9 6. You know as soon as you apply the ‘Rule of Fifteen’ how to play this suit, since there are only five cards higher than the 7 ($15-3-7=5$) outside of your partner’s hand and you can see four of them.

If declarer plays small from the dummy, you will do the same. Otherwise you will simply cover whatever is played from the dummy, since declarer is known to hold either the Ace or the King or the Jack, but no more than one of these. Allowing declarer to win the trick with the Jack will not cost, since if he has J X, he has a guaranteed trick in the suit no matter which card you play. Automatically playing the Queen will cost your side a trick whenever declarer holds A X or K X, since eventually the 10 in the dummy will be promoted.

‘Smith Peter’ Signals

Applying the ‘Rule of Fifteen’ can sometimes leave partner unsure of whether to continue with the same suit when he regains the lead. Using the example outlined above, how does partner know that he should continue the suit after declarer wins the first round with the King? Quite often such decisions are critical to the success or failure of a defence. Inevitably a signalling system has been devised to cope with these circumstances. Known as ‘Smith Peters’, the system works as follows: If you like partner’s opening lead and want it continued, you play a *high*

card on the first round of declarer's suit – followed by a *lower card* on the second round. Thus if you play low high, you are denying an interest in partner's opening lead and, by implication, asking partner to switch to a different suit. The primary statement when following low-high is denying an interest in a continuation. Only secondarily are you suggesting a switch – you may or may not have a suit of your own.

Example 4

| | | | |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|
| | ♠ | Q 9 6 | |
| | ♥ | K 7 4 3 | |
| | ♦ | 8 4 | |
| | ♣ | J 10 6 2 | |
| | | N | |
| ♠ | 10 8 3 2 | | |
| ♥ | A 8 | W | |
| ♦ | K J 7 | | |
| ♣ | K 9 7 5 | | |
| | N | E | S |
| | | 1NT | P |
| | P | 2♥ | P |
| | P | 3NT | All pass. |
| | | | W |
| | | | 2♣ |
| | | | 2NT |

Playing third-highest leads, partner leads the ♠7. Declarer covers with the ♠8 and takes the ♠9 with the ♠K. Declarer has 13-14 HCP and is known to hold a four-card ♥ suit and (almost certainly) ♠K X, since partner is unlikely to have led from a three-card ♠ suit when the dummy has implied that he has four ♠s. Partner has 9-10 HCP, ♠A J 7 X and three ♥s and *at least four* ♦s, since declarer has opened 1NT and would not have done so with 2-4-5-2 or 2-4-6-1 shape. Therefore declarer has either 2-4-4-3 or 2-4-3-4 shape, while partner has either 4-3-4-2 shape or 4-3-5-1 shape, with one of the minor suit Aces or two of the three missing Queens. From this analysis it can be seen that count signals (particularly after an opening bid in no-trumps) are frequently redundant. Even worse, they can be dangerous since declarer may require some idea of the shape of the defenders' hands to make his contract.

Since you are certain to make the ♥K, declarer can only make his contract if he holds both minor suit Aces. Otherwise the defence will be able to take three ♠ tricks, a minor suit Ace and the ♥K to defeat the contract.

If partner holds both red suit Queens, declarer can make his contract by guessing right in the ♦s, providing he can then take four ♦ tricks. To do this he must hold precisely ♦A 10 9 X.

If South holds the ♥Q and the ♣Q the contract cannot be made even with four ♦ tricks, since declarer will have one ♠, one ♥, four ♦s and two ♣ tricks and will not have the time to establish a ninth trick.

If partner holds both minor suit Queens the contract can only be made if declarer can take the right guess in ♦s and then brings in the suit for no losers. This will give him the time to establish his ♥Q for the ninth trick.

If declarer holds ♥Q J 10 X of hearts and both minor suit Aces, he can make his contract by taking the right guess in ♦s and establishing a third ♥ trick.

If declarer has any of the other possible holdings he cannot make his contract – *provided the defence take their three ♠ tricks*.

But South has a problem if he gets on lead before North. How does he know to continue with a low ♠ to North's ♠Q? Playing 'Smith Peters' is the only method to let him know that you like his opening lead and want him to continue with a *low card* on the second round of ♠s, assuming that declarer switches to a ♦ (or a ♣) at trick two. If he switches to a ♦ you will play the ♦8 and if he switches to a ♣ you will play the ♣6, intending to follow with a lower card on the second round. Now partner will continue with a low ♠ when he gets in and the contract is likely to be defeated. If declarer switches to a low ♥ to the ♥A, you will play the ♥7 on the first round followed by the ♥3 on the second round (in case partner started with ♥J X X and declarer has a guess to make). This line relies on declarer being unable to establish six minor suit tricks without losing the lead.

There are also many occasions when the defender who has made the original opening lead needs to signal to his partner that a switch to a different suit is required. Once again it is a 'Smith Peter' signal that comes to the rescue. This time, however, the play of a high card followed by a lower card on the second round of declarer's suit tells partner that *he should switch to a different suit rather than continue with the first suit*. (although some partnerships reverse this sequence to avoid confusion.) More often than not the decision as to which suit is the correct switch is obvious from a sight of the dummy or by simply recalling the auction. Sometimes it is vital that partner should switch immediately if the contract is to be defeated. Here is a good example...

Example 5

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----------|-----|---|--------------|
| | | | | ♠ | J 9 6 4 |
| | | | | ♥ | A Q 10 8 |
| | | | | ♦ | 7 2 |
| | | | | ♣ | 6 3 2 |
| | | | | | |
| | | N | | ♠ | A 7 |
| | | | E | ♥ | 7 6 3 |
| | | | | ♦ | A Q 10 9 6 4 |
| | | | | ♣ | K 8 |
| | | | | | |
| N | E | S | W | | |
| | | P | 1NT | | |
| P | 3NT | All pass. | | | |

For better or worse, North elected to lead the ♠4 rather than the ♥8. North's thinking was that a ♥ lead was too likely to give away an unnecessary trick and that partner was very likely to be deceived by the lead of the ♥8, since it would probably be difficult to read this as fourth-highest. Partner's ♠10 was taken by the ♠K and declarer switched to the ♦J at trick two. It should be obvious that the only realistic chance to beat this contract is that partner holds the ♦K *and will switch to a heart when he gets in*. If South holds ♥J X X (or better) the contract will go at least one down on an immediate ♥ switch, but it will certainly make if declarer holds the ♣A and partner continues with a second round of ♠s. The point is that you know that declarer holds the ♠Q (since partner did not play it on the first round) but partner does not know this and may think it is vital to knock out the ♠A to establish your suit. Thus you must give partner a clear signal that a switch is required by playing the ♦7 under the ♦J. Assuming that the ♦J holds the first trick, you will follow with the ♦2 on the second round, thereby completing the 'peter'. Even if partner wins the first round of ♦s, your play of the ♦7 should give him an inkling that a switch might be required.

| | |
|---|----------|
| ♠ | J 9 6 4 |
| ♥ | A Q 10 8 |
| ♦ | 7 2 |
| ♣ | 6 3 2 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| | S |
| ♠ | 9 7 2 |
| ♥ | K J 10 3 |
| ♦ | K 8 7 5 |
| ♣ | K 2 |

| N | E | S | W |
|---|----|-----------|-----|
| | | | 1NT |
| P | 2♣ | P | 2♠ |
| P | 4♠ | All pass. | |

At the first table South recognised early that there was a good chance that he could be end-played later and that it was essential to preserve an entry to the North hand. Therefore he *discouraged* with the ♦5. Declarer won the first round and switched to a ♠. South dropped the ♠9 under the ♠A and declarer continued with a second ♠ from the dummy. When South followed with the ♠2, declarer gave him a suspicious look and finessed the ♠Q, deciding that South was attempting to bamboozle him with a false count. North won and switched to the ♥7 and now declarer was in trouble. South played the ♥10 and declarer correctly allowed this to hold, hoping that South had started with a doubleton trump and that he would now cash the ♦K and be end-played. But South simply exited with a low ♦ to partner's ♦J and a second round of ♥s was returned. Declarer had no choice but to win the ♥A since a third round might well be ruffed. After drawing the last trump declarer took the ♣ finesse. When this lost to South's ♣K the declarer had to concede a second ♥ trick to go two down.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------|---|---|-----------|---|---------|--|--|--|
| | | | ♠ | Q 4 | | | | | |
| | | | ♥ | 7 5 | | | | | |
| | | | ♦ | Q J 9 4 2 | | | | | |
| | | | ♣ | 9 7 4 3 | | | | | |
| ♠ | K J 10 5 | | N | | ♠ | A 8 6 3 | | | |
| ♥ | A 9 4 | W | | E | ♥ | Q 8 6 2 | | | |
| ♦ | A 6 | | S | | ♦ | 10 3 | | | |
| ♣ | Q 10 8 6 | | | | ♣ | A J 5 | | | |
| | | | ♠ | 9 7 2 | | | | | |
| | | | ♥ | K J 10 3 | | | | | |
| | | | ♦ | K 8 7 5 | | | | | |
| | | | ♣ | K 2 | | | | | |

At the second table, however, South elected to encourage with the ♦8 on the first round of the suit. Declarer could see that there was a potential loser in each suit and that the best chance was an end-play. Therefore he ducked the first ♦ to eliminate the suit. Without too much thought, North continued with a second round of ♦s. Declarer cashed the ♠A K,

intending to exit with a third round to the ♠Q and hoping for an end-play position on whoever won. As it happened, the ♠Q came down on the second round and declarer was able to restrict his losers to one ♥, one ♦ and one ♣ to bring home the contract.

Results such as this are very costly and it would have been interesting to listen to the post-mortem. No doubt no one would have been willing to take the blame. The hand is interesting mainly in that it is a very good illustration of the basic flaw with any signalling system – i.e. that signals should never take the place of thought! Far too often players will religiously obey their partner's signals rather than think out what is required to defeat a particular contract.

Suit-Preference Signals

There is another form of signalling – known as the suit-preference signal – which can be very valuable in those situations where the defenders need to establish their tricks quickly. Usually the suit-preference signal is given via the first discard, but on occasion it can be applied when the situation in the suit being led is already known. When the signal is being made by means of a discard, the system works as follows:-

- When a defender makes his first discard, that discard signals to his partner several items of information:-
 1. He has no interest in the suit he is discarding, unless the discard is a 9 or higher.
 2. If the discard is a high card (6-8) he wants his partner to switch to the highest-ranked of the remaining suits, *excluding trumps*.
 3. If the discard is a low card (2-4) he wants a switch to the lowest-ranked of the remaining suits, *excluding trumps*.
 4. If the discard is a card that signals a suit known to be held by the dummy or the declarer, or signals a suit where the position has already been revealed to both defenders, then a negative inference should be drawn (i.e. “Partner, I have no tricks outside of the trump suit and you should cash whatever winners you have.”)

This discard system is known as “McKenney discards”. When defending against no-trump contracts, it may be necessary to refine the system to be able to signal any one of three suits. This is because you may not be able to safely discard to signal a particular suit without discarding from the suit itself.

With a little thought, you can adapt the McKenney discard system to use as a suit-preference signal on the lead. Be warned though! This

should only be done when the position is clear to both defenders. For example, there is an opportunity to make a suit-preference signal on this next deal.

Example 7

| | | | | | |
|-----------|---|----------|---|-----|---------|
| | | | | ♠ | J 8 7 5 |
| | | | E | ♥ | Q J 4 3 |
| | | S | | ♦ | Q 6 4 |
| | | | | ♣ | Q 7 |
| | ♠ | 9 4 2 | | | |
| | ♥ | 10 9 7 2 | | | |
| | ♦ | A 7 | | | |
| | ♣ | 9 8 6 2 | | | |
| N | | E | S | W | |
| | | | | 1 ♠ | |
| 2 ♥ | | 3 ♠ | P | 4 ♠ | |
| All pass. | | | | | |

When North leads the ♥A, you know (and partner is about to discover!) that declarer is void in ♥s. So you can take the opportunity to give a suit-preference signal on the lead. You should play the ♥10 to signal for the highest-ranked suit outside trumps (i.e. ♦s) as soon as your partner gets in again. Such a signal could be critical since the declarer made no attempt to test for slam chances in the auction despite having no ♥ losers. Therefore there is a good chance that he may need to play on ♣s to set up ruffs, before drawing the trumps. If partner holds both the minor suit Kings, the contract can be defeated if he gets in with the ♣K before the trumps are drawn, *provided he switches to a low ♦ as soon as he is in*.

Note that East's 3♠ bid is unwise. His side must have very good chances against a 3♥ or 4♥ contract. 2♠ is definitely correct when you have good length and strength in the opponents' suit, following the principle of bidding what you think you (or your partner) can make.

Example 8

| | |
|---|------------|
| | S |
| ♠ | K 10 7 5 |
| ♥ | 8 6 |
| ♦ | 10 9 5 4 3 |
| ♣ | Q 4 |

| N | E | S | W |
|-----|------|-----------|----|
| 5♣! | 6♣!! | X | 6♦ |
| P | 6♥ | All pass. | |

On this adventurous auction, a suit-preference signal on the opening lead could well be vital. The lead of the ♣Q is mandatory since the declarer is known to be two-suited in the majors and a ♠ switch from North could be required to break up the potential ♠/♦ squeeze on South. Note South's clever double of the 6♣ cue-bid. The purpose of this was to transmit two items of information to his partner. Firstly, he wanted to show some sort of holding in the ♣ suit. Secondly, and far more importantly, he wanted to prevent his partner from contemplating a phantom sacrifice in 7♣. He could see that there was likely to be good chances to defeat any slam, but he would not be able to double the final contract unless East/West landed in 6♠. Thus the double of the cue-bid says (a) "Partner, do not bid again" and (b) "Partner, *in the event that I cannot make a penalty double of the final contract*, my opening lead will give a suit-preference signal indicating which suit I want you to switch to. Thus North knows that he is required to overtake the opening lead of the ♣Q and return a ♠, *because South has not made a penalty double of the final contract*. This can be a very useful weapon to have, as on this hand.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|---|---|--------------------|---|--------------|--|--|--|
| | | | ♠ | 9 | | | | | |
| | | | ♥ | 7 3 | | | | | |
| | | | ♦ | Q | | | | | |
| | | | ♣ | A K J 10 9 8 7 3 2 | | | | | |
| ♠ | Q 4 2 | | N | | ♠ | A J 8 6 3 | | | |
| ♥ | J 9 2 | W | E | | ♥ | A K Q 10 5 4 | | | |
| ♦ | A K J 8 6 2 | S | | | ♦ | 7 | | | |
| ♣ | 5 | | | | ♣ | 6 | | | |
| | | | ♠ | K 10 7 5 | | | | | |
| | | | ♥ | 8 6 | | | | | |
| | | | ♦ | 10 9 5 4 3 | | | | | |
| | | | ♣ | Q 4 | | | | | |

The ♣ lead and the ♠ switch are both essential, because otherwise South is squeezed on the sixth ♥ (set out the hand and try it). East should have resisted the temptation to cue-bid 6♣ on his hand. If it had been South rather than North who had opened with 5♣ there would have been

a better case for East to bid 6♣, since North is now more likely to hold any outstanding major suit honours and, provided there is an entry to the West hand, there is a reasonable chance that any necessary ♠ finesse would succeed. Many players seem to suffer from an irrational impulse to make a suicide bid when opponents pre-empt in front of them.

After the ♣ lead and ♠ switch, declarer decided that he did not have enough for the squeeze in ♠s and ♦s and, given the auction, he could not rely on the ♦s to break kindly. Therefore he finessed the ♠ and went two off when North ruffed the ♠ continuation.

There are numerous alternatives to the signalling systems outlined above (e.g. 'Revolving' discards or 'DODS' etc. etc.) They all have the same basic principle in common, however, which is to be able to communicate the best line of defence. They all suffer from the same basic flaw, as well – that is, a defender does not always have the appropriate card with which to signal. This can often lead to an over-reliance on watching partner's cards for signals rather than thinking through the problems raised by a particular hand. My own preference is to give as few signals as possible, restricting them to 'attitude' on partner's opening lead (or, preferably, 'Reverse Attitude'), with the first discard as discouraging in that suit unless it is a 9 or higher. While such limited options do force your partners to think more deeply than they may be used to, by and large, this works much better than looking for signals on the play of every card. It also has the benefit that you are not giving the declarer an easy time by telling him the location of the critical cards, which is a big bonus!

Frank Groome
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