

## Why learn about Defensive Carding?

### For Defenders:

- It is said often that defence is the most difficult aspect of the game. So any help in this arena will certainly improve your game.
- Declarer has full knowledge of partnership assets so s/he has an advantage. Any information provided by partner that will improve your overall grasp of the total assets of the partnership will be helpful.
- Good defensive signalling makes for a good partnership. Your partner will appreciate it if you can guide her/him to the proper defence in particular if you possess info that s/he does not.
- Finding and sending the appropriate signal to partner can often be the difference between a top and a bottom on a particular board.
- Familiarity with various signalling methods may result in you finding one that you really fancy and use .....which will help your overall standing in the bridge world

### For Declarers:

- Familiarity with various systems is essential if you are interested in playing competitively.
- Opponents are permitted and often do play various signalling systems.
- You better figure out quickly what your opponents are up to in every board to be able to interpret as well as block their signals.
- For each defensive system, there are certain measures the declarer can take to “muddy the waters” for the defence. If you are not familiar with the defenders’ system you will not be able to counteract.
- As declarer always make note (or ask) about their signalling agreements. DO NOT ASSUME.
- General rule of thumb is to use their methods.... if they are using standard signals and you want a particular suit continued play high. If they play Upside down, play low etc....

### For All:

- All systems have advantages and disadvantages. There is no universal agreement as to a “best system”
- Systems are often dependant on individual likes and dislikes as well as the rest of your bridge knowledge/arsenal
- Systems certainly help but DO NOT make better bridge players. The importance of proper communication with partner can not be overemphasized signalling is only part of the communication.
- Choose a method that YOU and YOUR PARTNER are COMFORTABLE with. Then practice practice and practice.

## **SUMMARY – COMMON DEFENSIVE CARDING SIGNALS**

### **STANDARD SIGNALS**

#### **A) Attitude Signals**

When following suit to partner's lead or discarding:

1. A high card indicates strength in the suit and asks partner to continue or shift to that suit.
2. A low card shows weakness in the suit and suggests a shift to another suit

*Advantages:*

1. Method most players are familiar with. No changes in thinking or methods required
2. In unblocking situations, an encouraging high card is sometimes also a necessary unblocking card

*Disadvantages:*

1. A high card often cannot be spared when trying to encourage.
2. A defender must constantly worry about whether or not to waste an important spot card while encouraging.
3. When discouraging with a low card, it is not always clear what suit the partner should shift to

#### **B) Count Signals**

When following suit to declarer's or dummy's lead; or in situations where count has the priority:

1. A high card indicates even number of cards (unless no choice) in that suit.
2. A low card indicates an odd number of cards in that suit.

*Advantages:*

1. Method most players are familiar with. No changes in thinking or methods required
2. In case of a doubleton, a high low signal is consistent with attitude signal in case of confusion if attitude or count applies
3. Occasionally, an unblock from a doubleton is required

*Disadvantages:*

1. The top of a doubleton often cannot be spared.
2. Intermediate spot cards in a four card suit are often important and cannot be spared to provide a signal.
3. A defender must constantly worry about whether or not to waste an important spot card when trying to signal with an even number of cards.
4. The count is occasionally more valuable to declarer; or there maybe more important information to signal

#### **C) Suit Preference Signals**

When giving partner a ruff, or when a switch to another suit is obvious, or in situations where suit preference is clearly necessary or a defender's holding in a suit is already known:

1. A high card indicates interest in the higher ranking side suit.
2. A low card indicates interest in the lower ranking side suit

*Advantages:*

1. The ability to signal for a suit other than the one in which the signal is being given.

*Disadvantages:*

1. Infrequent use because most often, attitude and count are usually in play
2. Occasional ambiguity whether or not suit preference applies.

## UPSIDE-DOWN SIGNALS

### A) Attitude Signals

When following suit to partner's lead or discarding:

1. A low card indicates strength in the suit and asks partner to continue or shift to that suit.
2. A high card shows weakness in the suit and suggests a shift to another suit

*Advantages:*

1. A high card can usually be spared when a defender wishes to discourage.
2. Less worry about wasting important spot cards
3. A discouraging signal from (say from top of a sequence) often gives partner extra information

*Disadvantages:*

1. Occasionally, in unblocking situations, a high card must be played when really encouragement is desired.
2. Occasionally, a high card cannot be spared to discourage.
3. The count is occasionally more valuable to declarer; or the count of that particular suit is not particularly important to defence; or there may be more important information to signal
4. If this is a new system for you, mistakes are to be expected including the occasional catastrophe.

### B) Count Signals

When following suit to declarer's or dummy's lead; or in situations where count has the priority:

1. A low card indicates even number of cards (unless no choice) in that suit.
2. A high card indicates an odd number of cards in that suit.

*Advantages:*

1. An honor need not be played from a doubleton to show count.
2. Possible valuable spot cards need not be wasted to show a 4 card suit.
3. Less worry about wasting important spot cards

*Disadvantages:*

1. Occasionally, it is not safe to play a high or even a middle card from a tripleton
5. Lack of familiarity resulting in misunderstandings or errors when starting to play this system.

### C) Upside –Down Attitude & Standard Count

Upside-Down Attitude Signals may be played in combination to standard count. However many situations may arise where it is not totally clear whether it is attitude or count.

Unless you are very comfortable with your partner and have detailed understandings of different situations; it is better to play Upside-Down attitude in conjunction with Upside-Down Count to avoid the ambiguities that the combination generates.

**ODD-EVEN (ROMAN SIGNALS)** - Combined attitude and suit preference -

In normal attitude situations (when following suit to partner's lead or discarding) Often in Standard or Upside-Down signalling once you discourage partner; S/He often does not know what suit to switch to. This method combines attitude and suit preference.

- 1) An **odd** spot card is encouraging.
- 2) A **low even** spot card is discouraging **AND** suit preference for the **lower** ranking side suit.
- 3) A **high even** spot card is discouraging **AND** suit preference for the **higher** ranking side suit.

*Advantages:*

1. It is possible to give a suit preference signal in an attitude situation resolving the problem for partner as to what suit to switch to.
2. When discarding, a defender can pitch from whatever suit is convenient and still convey the message to partner; whether it be encouragement for that suit or a switch to a desired suit.

*Disadvantages:*

1. A defender may have not been dealt the right odd or even spot cards with which to signal.
2. The suit preference connotation is not always clear with the discard of an even card because the defender may not have had the choice of high or low even cards to discard.

| <b>QUICK COMPARISON Chart for STANDARD, UPSIDE-DOWN and ODD EVEN Cards</b>               |                           |          |          |          |                       |                            |          |          |           |
|--|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
|  | <b>← Most Encouraging</b> |          |          |          |                       | <b>Least Encouraging →</b> |          |          |           |
| <b>Standard</b>  | <b>10</b>                 | <b>9</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>6</b>              | <b>5</b>                   | <b>4</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Upside-Down</b>   | <b>2</b>                  | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b>              | <b>7</b>                   | <b>8</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Odd- Even</b>   | <b>3, 5, 7, 9</b>         |          |          |          | <b>10, 8, 6, 4, 2</b> |                            |          |          |           |
| <b>(Note: in Odd-Even Carding systems EVEN spot cards also indicate suit preference)</b> |                           |          |          |          |                       |                            |          |          |           |

**LAVINTHAL DISCARDS** – No Attitude but strictly Suit Preference

**A defender's first discard is always a suit preference signal.**

1. A high card indicates strength in the higher ranking of the two remaining suits.
2. A low card indicates strength in the lower ranking of the two remaining suits.

*Advantages:*

1. A defender does not have to pitch from his strong suit to show strength in the suit.
2. A defender can choose the most convenient suit to discard from while transmitting the signal.

*Disadvantages:*

1. A defender (must discard) but may not want to particularly encourage ANY suit but partner will interpret the discard as suit preference.
2. Occasionally, the only safe pitch may be from a strong suit.
3. Potential ambiguity in situations where the suit discarded has previously been led. Is the discard indicating count or suit preference??

## **Very quickly for the KEENERS and the REALLY CURIOUS .....**

If you are interested in any of these ....let me know and I will provide you with more info and/or specific examples

### **THE SMITH ECHO**

When following suit to declarer's first lead at No Trump Contracts, both defenders signal attitude about the **Opening Lead**.

The idea being that the defender, who first wins a trick, will know whether to continue the suit originally led; or switch to another suit.

*Advantages:*

1. Information about the opening lead is important and gets conveyed quickly.

*Disadvantages:*

1. The count of the suit declarer attacks is usually a higher priority.
2. If the signaller does not have many cards to choose from, the signal may not be readable.

### **THE DISTRIBUTIONAL SIGNAL**

When declarer starts drawing trump, playing high low or alternatively low high provides partner on the distribution of your hand.

The principle behind this system is that every bridge hand falls into one of two categories:

- a) Three odd length suits and one even length suit (e.g. 5-4-3-1)
- b) Three even length suits and one odd length suit (e.g. 4-4-3-2)

So by letting partner know which of the two types of hand you have; s/he will often have a very early and a complete count of the hand.

*Advantages:*

1. Defenders often get a complete count of the hand very early in the play.

*Disadvantages:*

1. The signal must be given very early. So a defender often does not know whether or not he can afford to false card in the trump suit to lead declarer astray.
2. The normal use of the trump echo is lost.

### **ENCRYPTED SIGNALS (for the lovers of the esoteric.....)**

These signals can be used when both defenders know something about the hand that declarer does NOT. (Such as the exact distribution of a suit that declarer has shown out of). This info then becomes the key to encrypt the signals. This is as close as you can get to a dynamic (changing) carding system.

As an example: Once declarer shows out of a suit; each defender would know exactly how many cards each of them started with. So the agreement can be:

If opening leader started with even No. of cards in that suit; then standard signals are in effect

If opening leader started with odd No. of cards in that suit the Upside-Down Signals are in effect

A few examples of Upside Down attitude signals vs Standard signals

In each of the following 8 hands you are East, South is playing in 4♥ and West (your partner) leads ♠K (from A K or K Q)

You see the following dummy to your right:

♠ 10 6 5  
♥ Q J 3  
♦ K Q J 4 2  
♣ K 7

A) ♠ 9 2  
♥ 7 4  
♦ A 8 6 3  
♣ J 8 6 5 4

B) ♠ 9 7 2  
♥ 7 4  
♦ 9 8 6 3  
♣ A J 8 6

C) ♠ 3 2  
♥ 7 4  
♦ A 8 6 3  
♣ J 8 6 5 4

D) ♠ 9 8  
♥ 7 4  
♦ A 8 6 3  
♣ J 8 6 5 4

E) ♠ 4 3 2  
♥ 7 4  
♦ 9 8 6 3  
♣ A J 8 6

F) ♠ 9 8 7  
♥ 7 4  
♦ 9 8 6 3  
♣ A J 8 6

G) ♠ J 2  
♥ 7 4  
♦ 9 8 6 3  
♣ A J 8 6 5

H) ♠ J 8  
♥ 7 4  
♦ 9 8 6 3  
♣ A J 8 6 5

- A) East certainly wants spades continued.....to get a ruff. So, standard signallers will encourage with the ♠ 9; Upside-Down Signallers with the ♠ 2. Both signals will be easily understood.
- B) East does NOT want spade continued but would like West to switch to Clubs..... Standard Signallers will signal with the ♠ 2, Upside-Down Signallers with the ♠9 (For clarity signal with the ♠9 and NOT ♠7)  
Both signals are easy to read ..... A diamond switch is not looking good so a club switch appears to be the obvious  
**Tip: When signalling high, always signal with the highest card you can afford**
- C) Upside-Down signallers signal with the ♠ 2 While Standard Signallers play the ♠ 3 and hope for the best! This layout favours the Upside Downers.
- D) On this layout, the Standard signallers happily play the ♠9 while the Upside Downers play the ♠8 and hope for the best!!  
Compared to C) shows that occasionally the luck of which cards you have sometime determines which method is superior.
- E) Standard Signallers discourage with the deuce While Upside Downers try their best by playing the Four. The ♠4 is probably readable as both the ♠3 and the ♠2 are missing but still favours the standard signallers.
- F) This is the reverse of hand E) Upside-Downers can easily signal with the 9 while the standard signallers will play the ♠7. Again likely that East will get the message as the ♠8 and the ♠9 are still missing.
- G) This is the type of hand where Upside-Down signals have a clear gain. If the lead is from King and Queen West CANNOT afford to drop the ♠J. So standard players are "forced to encourage" with the ♠2 when it really is the most discouraging card. Of course the Upside-Downers happily encourage with the deuce
- H) This may appear to be the reverse of Hand G) but it really is not. While in Hand G) East was playing the lowest (most discouraging) card to encourage, at least in this hand the Upside-Downer is actually using his lowest card ♠8, to do what s/he wants which is... to encourage.

As a footnote to the hands where a club switch is requested: to guide the defence properly, if West has the ♣Q he/she should switch to a low club otherwise a high club would be the appropriate card.

One of the biggest advantages of the Upside-Down Signallers is that while they can almost always afford their lowest card to encourage; Standard signallers have to keep worrying about wasting a crucial spot card ..... **sometimes at trick one!**

This is particularly a real possibility when holding a four card suit and wanting to encourage

Four examples: In each case ..... **What does East play at trick 1?!?!?!?**

**Depending on your system ..... You will get a top or a bottom**

1) South is playing 4♠ and the lead is ♥Q

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

2) South is playing 3NT. From his worthless hand West tries the lead of ♥10 which from East's perspective is a great lead. Dummy plays low, how can East convey that message to West to continue hearts when West gets in with the ♦K?

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



It is not always rosy for the Upside-Downers either. As discussed there are a few disadvantages. Sometimes you are just not dealt the cards for Upside-Down carding

A couple of examples of **Critical decisions at trick one:**

3) **South is playing 4♠ ( West has overcalled 2♣ during auction) and the lead is ♣ K ( or ♣A depending on your system)**

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | ♠ A J 8 6<br>♥ Q J 10 6<br>♦ Q 7<br>♣ Q 10 7 |  |
| ♠ 2<br>♥ K 8 4<br>♦ J 10 8 3<br>♣ A K J 6 5 | ♠ K Q 10 7 5 4<br>♥ A 9 2<br>♦ A 6<br>♣ 9 8  | ♠ 9 3<br>♥ 7 5 3<br>♦ K 9 5 4 2<br>♣ 4 3 2 |

East plays the ♣4 to discourage and south ♣8 ...A diamond shift is essential here to beat the contract.....However from West's perspective was that an encouragement from a holding of ♣9 4?!?!?

Of course Standard signallers are happy to discourage with ♣2

4) **South is playing 4♠ and the lead is ♣ K ( or ♣A depending on your system)**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | ♠ K 9 6 4<br>♥ A K 6 3<br>♦ A K<br>♣ Q 8 5  |   |
| ♠ A 5<br>♥ 8 5 4<br>♦ 9 8 6<br>♣ A K 9 7 4 | ♠ Q J 8 3 2<br>♥ J 9 2<br>♦ Q 4 2<br>♣ 10 6 | ♠ 10 7<br>♥ Q 10 7<br>♦ J 10 7 5 3<br>♣ J 3 2 |

Again a shift to hearts is essential to beat the contract. Playing Upside-Down Signals which card should East play at trick 1 to discourage a club continuation?????

## EXAMPLES OF ODD-EVEN (Roman) Signals

Hands A) and B) are the type of hands Odd-Even Signals work well:

A) South Playing 3NT  
Lead ♠K  
(or ♠A per partnership Agreement)

♠ J  
♥ A K J 10 3  
♦ K 10 9 3  
♣ 6 5 4

♠ A K 10 7 3      ♠ 8 6 5 2  
♥ Q 8              ♥ 7 6 5 4  
♦ Q 7 5            ♦ A 6  
♣ J 10 2           ♣ 9 8 3

♠ Q 9 4  
♥ 9 2  
♦ J 8 4 2  
♣ A K Q 7

B) South Playing 4♠  
Lead ♠5

♠ J 10 6 4  
♥ A 10  
♦ Q 10 7  
♣ J 7 4 2

♠ A 5 3              ♠ 2  
♥ J 9 6 4           ♥ 8 7 5 2  
♦ 9 6 3             ♦ K J 4 2  
♣ 10 9 6            ♣ A K 5 3

♠ K Q 9 8 7  
♥ K Q 3  
♦ A 8 5  
♣ Q 8

Hands C) and D) are the type of hands Odd-Even signalling runs into trouble. Hand (D) being worst case scenario

C) South Playing 4♠  
Lead ♥K

♠ A 7 4  
♥ 10 5 3  
♦ K 8 4  
♣ A K Q J

♠ 8 3                      ♠ K 6  
♥ A K J 6              ♥ Q 8 2  
♦ J 10 9 6             ♦ Q 7 5  
♣ 10 8 2              ♣ 9 7 6 5 4

♠ Q J 10 9 5 2  
♥ 9 7 4  
♦ A 3 2  
♣ 3

D) South Playing 4♠  
Lead ♦K

♠ K J 3 2  
♥ 10 3  
♦ A 8 2  
♣ K J 10 9

♠ 7                        ♠ 9 8 6  
♥ 9 7 5 4 2           ♥ Q J 8 6  
♦ K Q 10             ♦ 9 7 3  
♣ 8 7 5 2            ♣ A Q 6

♠ A Q 10 5 4  
♥ A K  
♦ J 6 5 4  
♣ 4 3

## TWO EXAMPLES OF LAVINTHAL Discards

The first of course shows a situation where this system shines .....and the second well.....  
 Not as much Remember the key to this system is that a defender's first discard always is for  
 suit preference.

### 1) South is playing 3NT and the lead is ♦3

Declarer wins first trick in dummy with the 9 and chooses to continue with a diamond from  
 dummy at trick 2 ..... East knows that defence's best  
 chance is in hearts ....how can s/he tell partner?

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| -     | -    | -     | P    |
| P     | P    | 2NT   | P    |
| 3♣    | P    | 3♥    | P    |
| 3NT   | P    | P     | P    |

|   |                  |                 |  |   |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|--|---|-----------------|
|   | ♠                | <b>K 7 6 3</b>  |  | ♠ | <b>J 8 4 2</b>  |
|   | ♥                | <b>J 9</b>      |  | ♥ | <b>K 10 8 2</b> |
|   | ♦                | <b>Q 10 9 4</b> |  | ♦ | <b>7</b>        |
|   | ♣                | <b>J 7 4</b>    |  | ♣ | <b>A 8 5 3</b>  |
| ♠ | <b>10 9</b>      |                 |  |   |                 |
| ♥ | <b>Q 7 4</b>     |                 |  |   |                 |
| ♦ | <b>K 8 6 3 2</b> |                 |  |   |                 |
| ♣ | <b>10 9 2</b>    |                 |  |   |                 |
|   | ♠                | <b>A Q 5</b>    |  |   |                 |
|   | ♥                | <b>A 6 5 3</b>  |  |   |                 |
|   | ♦                | <b>A J 5</b>    |  |   |                 |
|   | ♣                | <b>K Q 6</b>    |  |   |                 |

### 2) South is playing 4♥ and the lead is ♥6.

This is the situation when East rather NOT give preference  
 for a suit but MUST!

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| -     | -    | 1NT   | P    |
| 2♣    | P    | 2♥    | P    |
| 3♥    | P    | 4♥    | P    |
| P     | P    |       |      |

|   |                |                  |  |   |                 |
|---|----------------|------------------|--|---|-----------------|
|   | ♠              | <b>J 6 5</b>     |  | ♠ | <b>K 10 4 2</b> |
|   | ♥              | <b>Q J 10 2</b>  |  | ♥ | <b>8</b>        |
|   | ♦              | <b>J 6 5</b>     |  | ♦ | <b>K 10 4 2</b> |
|   | ♣              | <b>K J 9</b>     |  | ♣ | <b>A 8 5 2</b>  |
| ♠ | <b>8 7 3</b>   |                  |  |   |                 |
| ♥ | <b>A 6 5</b>   |                  |  |   |                 |
| ♦ | <b>Q 8 3</b>   |                  |  |   |                 |
| ♣ | <b>7 6 4 3</b> |                  |  |   |                 |
|   | ♠              | <b>A Q 9</b>     |  |   |                 |
|   | ♥              | <b>K 9 7 4 3</b> |  |   |                 |
|   | ♦              | <b>A 9 7</b>     |  |   |                 |
|   | ♣              | <b>Q 10</b>      |  |   |                 |

East wants west to lead spades or Diamonds whichever Q West holds in this case D but since east  
 is not sure s/he rather West make the call. West has to figure out that since East's signal was so  
 ambiguous, s/he must have about equal strength in ♠ and ♦ and hopefully switch to diamonds