

STAMFORD BRIDGE CLUB

Wednesday 14th October 2015

SIGNALS IN DEFENCE

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The aim of this workshop is to improve partnership defence by learning how to communicate information about what you hold; and to interpret your partner's signals.

It builds on earlier workshops on defence.

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BRIDGE IS A PARTNERSHIP GAME

Defence is a language.

What does partner have?

How do we defeat this contract (or limit overtricks)?

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Some Common Utterances

“I don't bother with/understand signals”

“I never notice what my partner plays”

“We don't have an agreement on signals”

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There are many signalling systems in use but we will keep it **simple**.

We'll look at ...

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1. Signals on partner's lead
2. Signals on declarer's lead
3. Discarding
4. Suit preference signals

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1. SIGNALS ON PARTNER'S LEAD

Generally: **HELD**
High Encouraging
Low Discouraging

This is known as an 'Attitude' signal

i.e. If you like the lead, play the highest card you can afford; if you dislike it play a low card.

nb: some of you might play so-called reverse signals where "low likes" – that's fine, you'll just have to bear in mind that your carding will be different from "Wednesday Morning Standard".

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Why is this important?

It helps partner to know whether to continue the suit or switch to another.

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2. SIGNALS ON DECLARER'S LEAD

Giving info on what high cards you have may help declarer as much as partner

Therefore we give Count signals

Generally **HELO**

High Even (number of cards)

Low Odd (number of cards)

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So if declarer leads, say, a spade and you have

♠7 2 Play ♠7 first - this strongly suggests an **even** number.

If you have

♠7 5 2 Play 2 first. This shows an **odd** number.

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Partner should be able to tell from what he has, from what is in dummy and from the bidding that you have, for example, 3 rather than 5 cards.

If you have 4 cards, play second highest then fourth – **this is very important because playing the 2nd lowest on the 1st round would be more difficult for partner to read.**

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Why is giving a count signal important?

It helps partner to know, for example, whether to hold up:

North

♠ 5 3

♥ 7 4 3

♦ 6 5 2

♣ K Q J 4 3

East

♠ J T 6 4

♥ Q J T

♦ 8 4 3

♣ A 5 2

South: 2NT; North 3NT

What is the point of this hand?

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East needs to hold up ♣A when declarer plays on clubs.

But for how long: one round or two?

The answer is that partner will tell you how many clubs he holds and you can then work out how many declarer has.

Partner will do this by playing a **count signal** when he follows to the clubs.

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Pay attention to partner's cards.

On the first round of clubs partner played ♣6. This was the lowest club outstanding, and so partner is telling you that he holds an **odd** number.

When the second round of the suit is played and partner follows, you know that this must mean three. So declarer has only two clubs and you can win the second round.

(If you don't, declarer's extra club tricks may be all he needs)

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It is possible to give helpful information to declarer, but generally better to concentrate on giving info to partner:

♣ K Q 10 7
♣ J **9** 8 4 ♣ **3** 2
♣ A 6 5

Do you give a signal here?

If both defenders **woodenly show an even number** (as above), declarer could work out that he needs to finesse the ♣10 on the third round (rather than playing for a 3-3 split). Better to play ♣4 (West) and ♣2 (East).

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Here's a summary of why count signals are important (useful post-session reading material):

- A When declarer plays a suit, the defenders usually try to help each other by giving a count signal: high-low shows an even number, playing "upwards" shows an odd number.
- B Count signals are particularly useful when dummy has a long suit with limited (or no) entries and we are holding up a top card to spoil declarer's communications.
- C Just because you can win the trick, it does not mean that you should. Holding up can be a useful weapon for the defenders.
- D When dummy has a long suit that may produce winners together with an entry, it may be vital to attack and drive out this entry before the winners are established (then a count signal may come into play).

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3. Suit Preference Signals

You hold

♠ 3 2

♥ A 9 3

♦ 7 6 5 2

♣ J T 9 3

Contract 1NT. Partner leads ♠A K 4

On ♠A you play 3 (**discouraging**) and on ♠K you play 2 (also showing **count** – 2 cards). On the 3rd spade you stop and think?

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Why did partner lead Spades? Strange lead if he has only 3.

He probably has a long suit, so why did he play ♠4 on the third round.

He is saying “if you get in – as you will with ♥A – play a club (lower suit)”.

This is a **Suit Preference Signal**.

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Similarly if partner plays A K **x/(x)** against a suit contract, giving you a ruff on the 3rd trick, partner's 3rd card can show which suit he wants you to return (**high** card for **higher** side suit; **low** card for **lower** side suit).

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4. DISCARDS

When discarding, again generally **HELD**

High Encouraging

Low Discouraging

So generally a low card shows no interest in the suit; but count *may* still be useful to partner to build a picture of the hand (judgment may come in).

If partner has shown a good suit, try to keep one to return if/when you get in.

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