

# Signals & Discards

Patrick, November 2016

# What are SIGNALS ?

And when do they happen?

- (potentially) every time you are not busy trying to win the trick, and have a choice of plays, you can pass partner a message
- (meaningful) discards are just signals used when not following suit

# Why Signals & Discards matter

- Tight defence makes declarer work
  - and declarers often go wrong
- In club and county bridge
  - more gets lost on defence than declaring
  - and defence drops more at low level contracts
  - if done right, it is easier for double dummy defence than double dummy declarer play

# Signals & Discards

- Our aim is to help partner make choices, and you must always try to help partner, but
- **RULE #1**
  - signals and discards must not cost the contract
  - sometimes you can only afford one card
  - sometimes any available card is misleading
    - you must do what is least damaging

# What not to discard

- Suits that matter to declarer
  - length in hand or length in dummy
  - your short suits (usually)
  - declarer's two way guess
  - winners (usually) or potential winners
- Example from Tollemache
  - Playing in 6S and full hand

# Signals & Discards

- Our aim is to help partner make choices, so
- **RULE #2**
  - signals & discards **are information not instructions**
  - must be combined with other information
    - your own hand
    - the opening lead
    - declarer's choice of line
  - examples (1) hand (2) hand (3) hand

# Aspects of Signalling

- What the message is ?
  - most of today about this
  - key thinking space
- How to pass on the message ?
  - partnership agreements
  - will recommend later what to do
  - somewhat more mechanical

# Key question in Signalling

- What does partner want to / need to know?
  - this will vary on every hand, but three key themes
  - continue or switch ?
  - when to take winners ?
  - if a switch, to which suit ?
- You will not always read partner's mind
  - but you must try



# Key question : continue?

- Will it set up more tricks to continue ?
- Will it give away a trick to continue ?
- Will a trick disappear if we don't continue ?
  - different in suits and at NT
    - a ruff may matter at suit contracts
  - mostly dependent on honour positions
    - but sometimes on how other suits lie

“attitude”

# “Attitude”

- aka Encourage / Discourage
  - but beware the wrong connotations from this
- build around high card location
- when referring to a different suit or suits
  - called suit preference

# Key Questions : continue?

- Example 4
  - sitting W and sitting E
  - full diagram-1
  - full diagram-2
- Example 5
  - sitting W and sitting E
  - full diagram-1
  - full diagram-2

# Key Questions : length ?

- THEME 1 : do we have a ruff to take ?
  - [Example 6](#) and [full diagram-1](#)
  - [Example 6a](#) and [full diagram-2](#)
  - differentiating 2 and 4 is tricky
    - traditional pattern with “xxxx” is “x12x”
    - but first is higher from touching honours
  - partner led the K not the A

# Knowing about length

- THEME 2 : cutting communications
  - most important for entry-less dummy
- Example 7
  - sitting W and full diagram
  - if you had one less diamond ?

# Knowing about length

- THEME 3 : winners might disappear
  - mostly high level contracts with long suits
- Example 8
  - sitting W and full diagram-1
  - and full diagram-2

# Knowing about length

- **THEME 4 : counting the hand**
  - counting defensive tricks
  - counting declarer's tricks
  
- **Worth doing almost all the time**
  - default is high-low for even number
  - but do not waste a Q/J/T (and careful with a 9)

# Key Questions : which switch?

- Standard Rule = higher card for higher suit
  - when partner needs to switch
  - when putting partner on lead
  - or just whenever you can !
- Commonest case : giving a ruff
- Example 9
  - sitting W and full diagram



# KEY POINTS SO FAR

- Signals never replace logic
- Signals give information not instruction
- Sometimes only one card is affordable
  - so don't read too much into it
- Best to work out what partner needs to know and signal accordingly

# BOARDS PLAYED

- Board 1 problem and Board 1 hand : setting up the setting trick
- Board 2 problem and Board 2 hand : suit preference to cash out

# But which signal when ?

- Key is being on same wavelength as partner
  - which is why some play only count
- You need to recognise what partner will want to know
  - sometimes choice of lead can help you

# LET'S TRY SOME SAMPLE PROBLEMS

Look at the handouts ...

# Exercise Sheet 1

- Q1 : partner leads a small card against 1NT and dummy plays its highest which you cannot beat; what do you (usually) signal if dummy had these holdings
  - QJ6 < count
  - K6 < attitude
  - A6 < attitude

# Exercise Sheet 1

- Q2 : partner leads the ace against 3NT and dummy plays low; what do you (usually) signal if dummy had these holdings
  - 76 or 765 < attitude
  - J76 < attitude
  - QJ6 < count
  - KQJ6 < suit preference

# Exercise Sheet 1

- Q3 : partner leads the king against 4H; what do you (usually) signal if dummy had these holding
  - 432 < attitude
  - JT3 < count
  - QJT < count
  - 8 < suit preference

# What we signal

- helping the decision at NO TRUMPS
  - STRONG KING leads are special
    - unblock, overtake, or count
  - so lead of QUEEN can be KQ... or QJ...
- helping the decision at suits : when you have a choice many play
  - A for attitude
  - K for count



# How we signal

- Traditional defaults
  - high-low ENCOURAGES or EVEN
  - high card for higher suit in suit preference
- Current wisdom (reverse/upside-down)
  - low-high ENCOURAGES or EVEN
  - still high card for higher suit

*discards coming*

# How we signal : key points

- Never be stingy – highest you can afford
- It's not just one card is the signal
  - second card can be a signal too (usually of a different nature)
- Never high-low with queen
  - unless you have the jack as well
- Only high-low with J/T(9) if known to be safe

# Other Approaches to Signals

- **ODDS / EVENS**
  - short of benefits over high/low and might be worse sometimes
- **ODDS for attitude, EVENS for suit preference**
  - Italian style (so deserves respect) but often seen to go wrong
- **SMITH PETERS**
  - attitude but in another suit

# SUIT PREFERENCE signals

- High for highest suit, low for lowest suit
- When partner stuck on lead
- When putting partner on lead
- When following suit with spare cards
  - and Example 8 again [full diagram-3](#)

# Recommended Signals

- Attitude on partner's lead, except
  - when not relevant (honours known, dummy singleton)
  - lead of STRONG K at no trumps
  - lead of KING above 3N
- Count initially on all suits led by declarer
- Suit Preference whenever you can
- Any downsides ?

# Recommended Discards

- If you count the hands
  - show count, but discard weakest first
- Otherwise, suit preference
  - discard from unwanted suit
  - high for higher other, low for lower other
  - aka McKenney and Lavinthal
  - (“Revolving” is exactly equivalent)

often very little choice

# BOARDS PLAYED

- Board 3 problem and Board 3 hand : dropping the Q
- Board 4 problem and Board 4 hand : re-entry to partner

# KEY POINTS SO FAR

- Signals give information not instruction
  - the more the better : attitude matters, and count matters, and suit preference matters
- Best to work out what partner needs to know and signal accordingly
  - make it as clear as possible
  - don't give away tricks
  - don't help declarer (too much)



# KEY POINT IN ALL PLAY HANDS

- COUNT
- COUNT
- COUNT