

30/03/20 Hand of the week 7: Signalling in defence

Most people are familiar with basic signalling in defence. For example, on the opening lead the typical response is to play a High card to Encourage the suit, and a Low one to Discourage (HELD). Some people play inverted responses where low encourages and vice versa. Similarly, most pairs will have a system for encouraging or discouraging a suit on the first discard.

However, there are other opportunities to send information to your partner which can be useful. One example is when you need to show partner where entries are to your hand. Here is an example from a hand I played with Erika on 12th March.



West	North (Erika)	East	South (Me)
Pass	1♣	1♠	X ¹
3♠ ²	Passed out		

- 1- Negative double, shows 4 hearts
- 2- Bid to the fit

After a competitive auction EW end up in 3♠. South leads A♣. Everyone follows suit. You can see that South has either lead a singleton A or from Ax. In either case it is not helpful to signal to partner that you have the King, they will either have no second club to lead or will continue the suit anyway.

Assuming partner has lead a singleton they need get to your hand to your hand so that you can lead a second club for a ruff. How do you signal to partner that you have A♥?

In this situation you can use you clubs to signal a suit preference. The standard system is to play a high card to encourage the higher suit, and a low card to encourage the lower one (or at least discourage the high suit). So on the lead play 8♣ to encourage hearts, and 2♣ to discourage hearts/encourage diamonds.

Here is the full deal:

Dir: West
Vul: All

♠ J 2

♥ A K 8 2

♦ K Q

♣ K J 8 4 2

Optimum
NS 3H

♠ K Q 7 4

♥ 6 4

♦ 6 2

♣ Q 10 7 5 3

WEST
NORTH
EAST

4

WEST
SOUTH
EAST

♠ A 10 8 5 3

♥ Q 9 7

♦ A 8 4

♣ 9 6

17
10

7
6

♠ 9 6

♥ J 10 5 3

♦ J 10 9 7 5 3

♣ A

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	7	9	9	5	6
S	7	9	9	5	6
E	6	3	3	8	7
W	6	3	3	8	7

After North plays 8♣, South leads 3♥ to the K♥. As it happens on this distribution the defence should make 5 tricks as long as North does not continue with K♣- North can now either return 2♣ for a ruff, or lead the K♦. In either case NS end up with 5 tricks- AK♥, 2♣'s (either AK, or A and a ruff), and the Q♦.

Here is a more subtle example where the signal did make a difference, played with Martin on 12th March.

Dir: South
Vul: All

♠ K 6 2

♥ 6

♦ A J 10 8 7 4 3

♣ A 3

♠ A 7

♥ K Q 9 5 4 3

♦ Q 6 5

♣ 7 6

WEST
NORTH
EAST

7

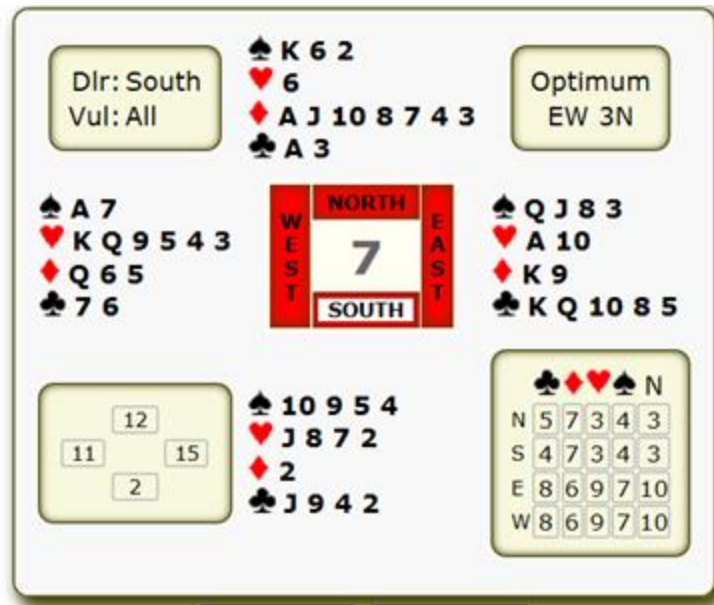
WEST
SOUTH
EAST

South (Me)	West	North (Martin)	East
Pass	1♥	2♦	X ¹
Pass	2♥	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♥	Passed out	

1- Negative double, 4 spades

Well there was a misunderstanding on our table and EW finished in 4♣, but most pairs should find the heart game. South leads the 2♦. This is almost certainly a singleton on this bidding sequence, as from a doubleton partner would lead high then low.

North wins the A♦. Martin now leads back 8♦ asking for a spade return (high card encourages higher suit, low card discourages high suit/encourages low suit). Although not a direct entry, this establishes the K♠ for the setting trick. The full deal:



If South returns a club at trick 3, East can ruff high on the 3rd round of diamonds, run the 10♥ to draw trumps and then discard the losing spade on the clubs.

Have a talk to partner about your defensive signalling!