

McKENNEY PREFERENCE SIGNALS

William McKenney was an American columnist, administrator and bridge player who died in 1950 but who left a legacy to the game in his 'suit preference' signals. They can be used in a wide variety of contexts but I shall only be showing two small application. The basis of their use is common to all applications. It relies upon the ranking order of the suits that is applicable during the auction I.e. spades (highest), hearts, diamonds and clubs (lowest) The card chosen will point to one of two suits to partner on the basis that if it is a highish card, it will indicate the higher-ranking of the two, while if it is a low card, it will indicate the lower-ranking of the two suits. A hand will illustrate.

♠ 10 8 6 3
♥ K 8 5 4
♦ 8
♣ K 7 6 5

N	♠ J
E	♥ A Q 9 2
	♦ Q 9 6 5 2
	♣ Q 9 3

Suppose that South plays in 4♠. Partner leads a low diamond and your queen loses to the ace. Declarer cashes the ace of trumps and continues with a second round.

It looks natural to discard a diamond Using McKenney discards, how can you ask partner for hearts as you do so? We exclude two suits – diamonds, the suit you are discarding – and spades – the (trump) suit being led. A McKenney discard can thus ask either for hearts or clubs. Since hearts is higher ranking than clubs, a high diamond asks for a heart. The clearest diamond to play to ask for a heart is the nine, your highest remaining diamond.

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

West
♠ 5 2
♥ A K 9 2
♦ A 5 3 2
♣ 7 6 5

East
♠ 9 8 4
♥ 10 3
♦ J 10 9 8
♣ J 10 9 8

South
♠ A K Q J 10
♥ Q 8 7 4
♦ 7 6
♣ A 4

South is in a contract of four spades and receives the lead of the ace of hearts. East begins the peter with the '10' and completes it with the '3' when West plays the king of hearts. West will now play a card that she has high hopes her partner will ruff. But West is looking ahead and would like to be able to tell partner that a *diamond* return--*not* a club--would produce a second ruff. How do they do it? By using McKenney.

The principle is exactly that described above. When West leads the 9 of hearts (for partner to ruff) she is saying that a diamond will get her on lead again. If she had led the 2 of hearts, that would have been the signal for a club. (Diamonds are higher ranking than clubs and the 9 is higher than the 2).

Nothing is perfect and you may have two problems here. If West's heart holding had been A K 3 2, East would never have guessed that the 3 of hearts was a signal for a diamond. The other more common problem is that having given your partner a ruff, you don't have any sort of an entry at all!