

## Communicating on Defense

Defenders have two advantages over the Declarer. First, they get to make the opening lead. And second, the defenders get to communicate with each other during the play of the hand.

- Nice lead, partner. The A♣. I have the Q♣- keep them coming!
- Ugh. Not the A♣! I've got nothing in clubs. Better switch to something else.
- Clubs are definitely not going to work. I like diamonds. Can you switch?
- Those hearts in dummy are scary. Do you have the Ace? If it helps any, I have three little hearts.

By the rules of bridge, we can't talk to each other on Defense with words, signals, or gestures- but we can communicate by the cards we play. The primary card signals are **Attitude**, **Count**, and **Suit Preference**. When you play a card on Defense, it should be one of those three. But a card can only be one signal at a time, so you must recognize which is what when.

This lesson will include "Standard" signals. Some pairs prefer other methods, and they have their advantages and disadvantages. But there is nothing wrong with playing Standard. I suggest you play standard and perfect it before deciding if you want to play another system. Note: you only get 13 cards in a hand, and sometimes you don't have the right card you would like to have to signal. Do the best you can- the system is not perfect.

### Attitude Signals

When partner leads a new suit, whether opening lead or later in the play, the other defender has some choices on what to say.

When a defender leads a low card, that usually means she has an honor in that suit. The partner's job is to play a high card (third hand high) to force declarer to use up an honor. This is not an attitude signal.

If partner leads an honor card, it is generally assumed (good practice) that they have the touching honor just below it. Now, partner of the leader shows attitude. If they like the partner's lead, they say that by playing a high card. If they do not like the partner's lead, they say that by playing a low card.

Let's say, against a 4♠ contract, Leader leads the A♣. That should say she also has the K♣. What does the other defender do with these holdings?

♣ Q93- You like the suit and want partner to continue. The Q♣ might take the third trick or get ruffed. Play a high card, the 9♣- continue! When leader next plays the K♣, partner plays the 3♣- continue.

♣ 932- You don't like partner's lead. You have nothing of value in clubs. Play the 2♣. Plus, if the Q♣ is not in dummy, then declarer likely has it. Leader should switch to something else and hope partner gets in to lead clubs back through declarer to capture the Q♣.

♣ 93- You like the suit because you have a doubleton. You want partner to play the KC and give you a ruff. You play the 9♣ suggesting partner continue, and she should recognize your High-Low play (9♣-3♣) and play another club that you can ruff.

How do you signal when the dummy also has a doubleton? It depends on several things you might see. First, compare your trump holding to the dummy's trump holding. If you have high trump that can over-ruff the dummy, play high-low. If you have small trump that the dummy will win anyway, play the 3♣ to discourage. Sometimes you want partner to cash the K♣ even if the dummy can ruff the third club. You might see that declarer might discard clubs on another suit's winners. You might see setting tricks in your hand that depend on partner winning two club tricks.

Think about your plan for the defense when you play the doubleton club. Don't robotically play high-low just because you have a doubleton. Only play that when it will benefit your side.

♣ QJ3- This is a special case. You definitely like the suit, but it would be foolish to play the J♣ to tell partner that. In this case, you play the Q♣. That tells leader that you have one of two holdings, both of which guarantee that you can take the next trick. You might have a singleton Q♣ and can ruff the next trick, so leader can play a low club for a ruff. Or, it means you also have the J♣. Leader can also play a low club that you will win and can then play something back to him through declarer.

Treat the lead of a K or Q the same way, but it is a bit more involved in looking at the rest of the cards to determine if you like the suit or not. Let's say partner makes the opening lead of the K♣. Partner should also have the Q♣.

♣ 93- You like the suit because you have a doubleton. You play the 9♣ suggesting partner continue. If partner gets in and plays the Q♣, your 3♣ should show a doubleton. If you get in and play the 3♣, partner should recognize it as a doubleton. If there is still trump out, partner might give you a ruff. This case is harder because the high-low signal is interrupted by one or more other tricks.

Attitude signals are also used when you have to discard another suit. Let's say, against 4♠, partner leads the K♣ and declarer wins with the A♣. Declarer plays three rounds of trump. You only have two spades, so you must discard something else on the third round of spades. You have already given partner an attitude signal when he led the K♣, so it would be helpful to tell partner about your diamonds and hearts. A low diamond or heart says you don't like that suit. A high card says you like that suit—usually you have an honor in it. Maybe you have a heart honor, but you can't afford to waste a high heart, or you only have low hearts to signal with. You could play a low diamond instead and hope partner figures out what you have by process of elimination.

### Suit Preference

Let's say leader leads the A♣ against a 4♠ contract (again, leader should have the K♣). Dummy comes down and there is a singleton 3♣ on the table. Attitude would not be useful here. Whether the partner has the Q♣, QJ♣, or a doubleton club, it would be foolish for leader to play the K♣ or any other club. Declarer will ruff it in dummy and get on with the hand. Advantage declarer. In this case, the partner of the leader should tell the leader which suit to lead next. A high club says to lead hearts. A low club says to lead diamonds.

Leading unsupported aces is not encouraged, but sometimes it happens. If the leader leads the A♣ and the K♣ is in the dummy, this is another time for partner to show suit preference. It would not be productive for leader to lead another club. Partner should tell her what the best suit is to change to. A guideline you might use with your partner is this- If the dummy can take the next trick, your card is suit preference.

Another suit preference signal comes up when giving partner a ruff. Opening lead is A♣ and partner plays the 9 (attitude- I like it! Continue). Leader plays the K♣ and partner plays the 3 (I have the Q♣ or I am out). Leader expects partner to win the next trick either with the Q♣ or by a ruff. If partner does win the trick, how does he know what to

play next? Leader should tell him. If leader's third card is a high club, it suggests returning a heart. If leader's third card is a low club, it suggests returning a diamond.

Partner of the leader can also give suit preference signals. Let's say opening lead is the K♣ (should guarantee the Q♣). Declarer wins with the A♣ and starts to pull trump. Partner of the leader wins the second trick with the AS, remembers the opening lead, and sends a club back to partner's Q♣. Not just any club. A higher club suggests that a heart return might be helpful, and a low club suggests that a diamond return might be helpful.

## Count Signals

Count signals tell partner how many cards you hold in a particular suit. This is important to know so that defenders can figure out how the suits are dividing for the hand in play.

A low card says you hold an odd number of cards in the suit. A high card says you have an even number of cards in a suit.

Consider this layout in a 3NT contract. The dummy has a nearly solid club suit, only missing the A♣, and there are no other apparent entries to dummy. If declarer has the A♣, it doesn't matter- there are 5 tricks all day. But if partner has the A♣, he wants to hold up taking it to make sure the declarer does not get more clubs than he deserves. Declarer leads a low club toward dummy. How should defenders play?

♣ KQJT9

♣ 74

♣ A52

♣ 863

If East takes the A♣ on the first trick, declarer gets 4 club tricks.

If East takes the A♣ on the second trick, declarer gets 4 club tricks.

If East takes the A♣ on the third trick, declarer only ever gets 2 club tricks.

West holds the key. On the first club lead from South, West should not blindly play second hand low. She must give count. Play the 7, showing an even number of clubs. East can see 8 clubs in his hand and in dummy, so an even number (probably 2) means declarer has 3 clubs. West must hold up to the third round.

If declarer had two clubs and West had ♣ 874, West would show an odd number by playing the 4♣. East would figure declarer for two clubs and could win the A♣ on the second round of clubs.

Experienced bridge players figure out who has what on each hand by counting out the hand. It is important to tell partner how many cards you have in a suit as often as you can. If your job is to show attitude, do that. If your job is to win the trick, win it. If your job is to play third hand high to force out declarer's higher card, do it. If not, don't just be passive. Give current count- that is how many cards in that suit you have at the moment, not how many you started with. The defenders work together to help each other figure out the suit distributions for the hand.