

Intermediate Bridge Lesson

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Defensive Signaling I

Defense is the hardest part of the game of bridge. One sure way to improve your scores is through accurate defensive carding. Used properly, you and partner will cooperate to defeat contracts that pairs at other tables are making easily.

There are three kinds of defensive signals: Attitude signals, Count signals, and Suit Preference signals. Each applies in a different situation. You give Attitude signals when Partner leads a suit. You give Count signals when the Declarer leads a suit. Suit preference signals are the least common. You give Suit Preference signals in a variety of situations, the most common of which is when giving partner a ruff. Today we will discuss the first two kinds: attitude and count signals.

I. Attitude signals

A. How do attitude signals work?

- Attitude signals are given when PARTNER is leading a suit,
- They are especially helpful at Trick One,
- The play of a high card suggests to partner that she continue the suit; the play of a low card suggests that partner should switch to a different suit,
- A middle card tends to imply no preference, or say that the defender doesn't know which defense might be right on the hand,
- While 2's and 10's are clear signals, you may need to look at the cards in your hand and in the dummy to determine if a card such as a 6 or 7 is high or low.

B. Why would you want partner to continue or switch?

You may want partner to continue a suit because:

- You have an equal honor (e.g., partner leads either the K or the A from A-K -- depending on your partnership agreement -- and you have the Q),
- You have a doubleton and want partner to give you a ruff, or
- You don't want partner to break a new suit.

You may want partner to switch if:

- Continuing the suit would set up a winner in the dummy (e.g., partner leads the A or K from A-K and dummy has Qxx or Qxxx),
- Continuing the suit would give declarer a ruff and sluff,
- You need to get another suit developed right away, or
- You want to get a ruff or to give partner a ruff in another suit.

Note: it is often hard to figure out if you want partner to continue or switch.

C. Signaling with the Queen.

- A particular attitude signal applies when the opening leader plays the A or K from A-K and the leader's partner holds both the Q and the J. In this situation, RHO should play the Q on Trick 1. When opening leader leads from A-K, the play of the Queen by third hand always shows either a singleton or the Jack of the suit led. This enables LHO to know that she can get partner on lead.
- Note: While we normally play high from a doubleton, to show partner that we have two cards in the suit and can ruff the third round, when holding Qx doubleton, you must play small; the Queen always guarantees the Jack or no more cards in the suit.

D. In Third Seat, Think about All the Suits, Not Only the Suit Led.

- The third seat player should consider what line of defense is proper given the hand as a whole. For example, in a heart contract, partner leads the DA showing the Ace and King; you hold the Qxx of diamonds but also the AQ of spades over dummy's Kx of spades. Here, although you have an equal honor, you want partner to shift to a spade. You should play your smallest diamond to discourage diamonds. You hope partner will switch to a spade. After you take your spade tricks, you can switch back to diamonds.

Here is an example of using an attitude signal to defeat a contract. Third hand discourages the opener from continuing the opening lead suit:

Q84		
Q632		Contract: Four Spades
AK		Lead: Ace of Hearts
J1054		
K76	95	
AK107	J954	
10752	943	
62	KQ83	
AJ1032		
8		
QJ86		
A97		

The contract is 4S and the lead is the HA. With four cards in the suit and the HQ visible in dummy, RHO discourages a heart continuation by playing the H4. Since LHO can see playing on diamonds would be hopeless, LHO should switch to the C6, top of a doubleton. Partner's CQ will lose to the CA. However, when LHO is in with the SK, she can continue with a second club to partner's CK. RHO will see the play of the 6 and then the 2, and will return a third club for LHO to ruff. Defenders will set the hand with one heart trick, one club trick, the King of Spades, and a club ruff. If the opening leader had continued with the HK, declarer would ruff the King and be able to pitch a club loser on the HQ to make four.

II. Count signals

A. How do count signals work?

These signals are used when DECLARER is leading a suit.

- A count signal tells partner how many cards you have in a particular suit.
- A high card says you have an even number of cards in the suit; a low card says you have an odd number in the suit.

B. Why do you give count signals?

- Count signals may enable the defenders to prevent the declarer from developing a long suit in the dummy, when there is no side entry. Generally a defender will want to take his winner in a suit on the LAST card declarer has in the suit, to block communication between the closed hand and the dummy.
- Count signals may help partner get a count of the hand.
- Count signals may help partner figure out the proper line of defense.
- Count signals may help partner to determine what suit to keep and what to discard.

Here is an example of using count signals. LHO gives count to kill dummy's long suit:

J10		
875		Contract: Three No Trump
KQ1086		Lead: Three of Hearts
J72		
K9	Q8654	
Q9632	104	
972	A54	
1053	Q84	
A732		
AKJ		
J3		
AK86		

After an auction that proceeded 2N - 3NT, LHO leads the H3, fourth best from his five-card heart suit. This immediately gives declarer the HJ as a trick. However, Declarer has only 6 sure tricks outside of diamonds. If declarer can take three diamond tricks, he will make his contract. When declarer plays on diamonds, LHO must give count by playing the D2, showing an odd number of diamonds. RHO can see that there are five diamonds in dummy, three in his hand, and three in partner's hand. This leaves declarer with only two diamonds (5332 distribution in the suit). RHO should let declarer win the first diamond trick and take the second trick with the Ace. The one trick hold up limits declarer to a single diamond trick. Declarer may set up the thirteenth club for an eighth trick but will be set at least one. If RHO wins the first diamond, declarer will get four diamond tricks with the K, Q, 10, and 8, and make an overtrick. If RHO does not win the DA until the third trick in the suit, declarer will score two diamond tricks and can set up a long club for the ninth trick.

1

♠ A96
♥ KJ4
♦ K862
♣ Q73

♠ 1072
♥ 10963
♦ 104
♣ AK82

♠ 84
♥ AQ7
♦ 975
♣ J10954

♠ KQJ53
♥ 852
♦ AQJ3
♣ 6

Dealer: North
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	1 NT	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♣ A

2

♠ J75
♥ 9852
♦ 85
♣ Q965

♠ 1064
♥ A7
♦ KQ976
♣ 732

♠ AK82
♥ 1043
♦ J32
♣ AKJ

♠ Q93
♥ KQJ6
♦ A104
♣ 1084

Dealer: East
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1 NT	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♥ K

3

♠ AKJ7532
♥ A
♦ KJ10
♣ 87

♠ 6
♥ 9875
♦ 976
♣ QJ954

♠ 84
♥ 632
♦ AQ42
♣ AK32

♠ Q109
♥ KQJ104
♦ 853
♣ 106

Dealer: South
E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			Pass
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Opening Lead: ♣ A

4

♠ A1086
♥ Q10852
♦ 942
♣ 7

♠ K93
♥ AK7
♦ K107
♣ QJ64

♠ 754
♥ 93
♦ AQJ8
♣ A1093

♠ QJ2
♥ J64
♦ 653
♣ K852

Dealer: West
Both Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: ♥ 5

5

♠ 97654
♥ 96
♦ K6
♣ 8752

♠ 832
♥ AK10843
♦ 94
♣ K6

♠ K10
♥ Q752
♦ Q53
♣ AQJ3

♠ AQJ
♥ J
♦ AJ10872
♣ 1094

Dealer: North
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1 ♣	1 ♦
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: ♦ K

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Successful Bridge Defense, Part I – Hand Analysis

1. Dealer opens 1D and responder with an opening hand and five spades bids 1S. After opener's 1NT rebid, responder bids 2C, New Minor Forcing, to show a five card spade suit. Opener shows a spade fit and responder bids game. The lead is the CA from A-K and RHO sees that the CQ is in dummy, so RHO should discourage clubs. If LHO tries to cash the CK, declarer will ruff and get a heart discard on the CQ. Instead, LHO should switch to the H10. If declarer plays the Jack or King, RHO should cover to win the trick and then exit in a different suit so defenders can get three heart tricks. If RHO tries to cash a second heart immediately, declarer will win a heart honor. However, with proper defense, declarer will eventually have to give defenders either three hearts and a club or two hearts and two clubs, for down one.
2. Dealer opens 1NT and responder, with 9 hcp and a five card minor suit, bids 3NT. LHO leads HK, top of a sequence and RHO, with four hearts, should signal with the H9 for a continuation. LHO continues with a small heart to kill dummy's only side entry. When declarer plays on diamonds, RHO should play the 8, then the 5, high-low, to show COUNT. LHO reads that partner has 2 diamonds, so declarer has 3, and LHO should duck twice to keep declarer from making more than two tricks in the suit. Declarer can finesse in clubs for an eighth trick, but on proper defense is down one.
3. After two passes, third seat with a long spade suit and a very nice hand opens 1S. Fourth seat has a 13 count but no suit to bid, so passes. Responder raises to 2S and opener bids 4S. The lead is the CA and RHO should signal with the QUEEN, showing the Jack or a singleton, and therefore an entry in the suit. At Trick 2, LHO should underlead the CK to get partner on lead with the Jack. RHO should make the obvious switch to a diamond to enable partner to win both the DA and DQ. If LHO fails to play a small club at Trick 2, declarer can unblock the HA, draw trumps in three rounds ending in the dummy, and discard four losers on hearts to make at least ten tricks.
4. Dealer bids 1NT and responder bids 3NT to end the auction. LHO leads a fourth best heart and RHO plays the Jack. Declarer, who is more vulnerable in spades than hearts, should win Trick 1 with the King, which is a more deceptive card in a no trump contract than the Ace (declarer would have to win the King not holding the Ace, but can hold up with the Ace absent the King). When declarer runs the CQ, RHO should hold up once to see partner's signal. LHO should analyze the dummy and see that she wants partner to return spades, not hearts, and discard the TWO of hearts on the second club, discouraging partner from returning a heart. When RHO gets in with the CK, she should play the SQ, showing the Jack. Whether declarer plays the King or not, the defenders can take four spade tricks to set the hand. If RHO returns a heart instead, declarer will take seven tricks in the minors and two hearts to make three.
5. After a pass, second seat with a 14 count opens 1C. Third seat has six diamonds and a 13 count, and overcalls 1D. Responder bids 1H, opener shows heart support, and responder with six nice hearts and a 10 count will either bid 3H or 4H. If responder invites with 3H, opener will go to game. LHO leads the DK from Kx and RHO should signal for a SWITCH with the D2. RHO wants a spade lead from partner, not a continuation in diamonds. A spade switch is natural since clubs look like a source of tricks for declarer. If LHO switches to a spade, defenders will take two spades and two diamonds. If LHO continues with a second diamond at Trick 2, LHO can never get in again to lead spades, and defenders can only get one spade trick. There is no ruff available in diamonds since declarer with ten hearts can afford to ruff high. Declarer will score six hearts and four clubs for +4. The key to the hand is a discouraging signal at Trick 1 and a switch to a spade while LHO is still on lead.