

English Bridge

Signals and Discards

by David Bakhshi





David Bakhshi

The Attitude signal

A new series exploring signalling and discarding methods

The Attitude signal

THIS new series aims to review and evaluate the various signalling (and discarding) methods popularly employed by club and tournament players in this country.

Why is it useful to have a method of signalling to your partner?

Since bridge is a game in which facial expressions or physical signals are not permitted, it is important to have a means of communicating beyond the bidding. Thus, various signalling methods have appeared over time, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. These methods also entail varying degrees of complexity to the extent that confusion reigns for many social and club players.

When do signals occur?

When playing as a defender, it is possible to give a signal after partner has led, when declarer leads, or when throwing away (discarding).

For all signalling methods, the underlying principle is that when faced with a choice of cards to be played, different meanings can be attached to each choice.

This is a point that is often misunderstood, as one can only signal when faced with a choice of cards, and a played card cannot perform two duties at the same time. Therefore, one cannot try to win a trick and signal at the same time!

Let's start by considering the most common form of signal employed when partner has led . . .

Attitude signals are most useful when partner has led a high (honour) card which you cannot beat. Given that you will not be expected to win the trick, you will now be free to tell partner how you feel about his choice of lead. Throughout this article, I shall assume that standard leads are played.

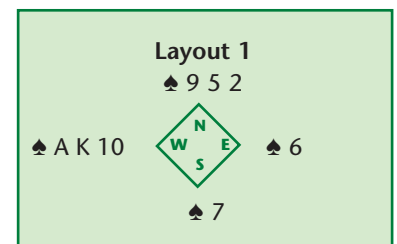
For example, defending against a 4♠ contract, your partner leads the ace of hearts (showing the king in that suit), and dummy has ♥4-3-2. Without the use of signals, your partner would be inclined to assume that he has found a good suit to attack, and would doubtless continue with the king of hearts at trick two and would probably play a third heart at trick three. This would be a good idea if you held the queen of hearts or a doubleton heart (in which case you could trump), but would not work so well if declarer was now able to win the third trick with the heart queen.

Using Attitude signals, at trick one, you can tell partner whether you wish him to continue playing hearts (assuming you have a choice of cards to follow with). The 'standard' way to do this is to throw a *high* card to *encourage* the opening lead, or a *low* card to *discourage* the lead ('*Low means No!*'). Those who employ 'reverse', or 'upside-down', signals convey the same meanings in the opposite way, so a high card is discouraging, whilst a low card would encourage the lead.

How do you know whether partner has played a high card or a low card?

This is often a stumbling block for those coming to terms with the idea of signalling. Two main principles are commonly used. One is that 'high' and 'low cards' are assumed to be non-honour cards (two through the nine). The second is that it is the relative value of the card which is important.

In practice, a two will always be deemed to be low, and a nine will be assumed to be high, whilst a card like a five or a six will often appear ambiguous. However, if the opening leader can see the two, three, four and five of the suit led between his hand and the dummy, then partner's six will be his attempt to play low. And if the opening leader can see none of the two, three, four and five, then it will be fair to assume that partner is trying to play high when throwing his six. For example:



You, West, lead the ace, East follows with the six, and South plays the seven. Has East encouraged or discouraged?

Though East's play of the six may appear hard to interpret, it is likely that he was attempting to encourage. Unless South holds both the three and four (and has managed to conceal both of them), then East has played one of his higher cards. He may have started with Q-6-4-3, or Q-6 and either the four or the three. Either way, West will usually do best to continue the suit.

Should one ever signal with an honour card?

Signalling with an honour is less frequent, but the principle is that *one should signal with an honour in the same way that one would lead an honour*. Therefore, if partner leads the ace of hearts, then throwing the queen of hearts is indicative of either of two things:

1. This is the third player's only card;
2. The third player also holds the ♥J.

This idea is useful, as it means that the opening leader can continue with a low card at trick two, knowing that either partner can win with the jack of hearts, or he can trump. It also follows that if the third player holds ♥Q-x, he should not throw the ♥Q under the ace of hearts, but instead play his small card. If the opening leader can judge to continue with the king of hearts at trick two, his partner will have to play the queen, but the opening leader will now know that partner has no more cards left in the suit.

How does the third player know whether to encourage the opening lead?

Again, the general principle is to ask yourself whether you would like partner to continue playing the suit he has led (either at the next trick, or when he later regains the lead). This is usually the case when holding an honour adjacent to the one partner has led. Thus, when partner leads the ace, you assume he has the king, and signal *encouragement* when holding the queen. Had partner led the king, you would assume he held the queen, and thus signal encouragement when holding the ace or the jack.

Efficient use of Attitude signals, however, requires a good deal of intelligence and logical thinking, as a signal should be given in the context of the whole deal, and it may be necessary to discourage the opening lead with an apparently useful holding if the third player would prefer the opening leader to switch suit. Consider the following two situations:

- Defending a spade contract, partner leads the ♥A, and you hold a doubleton heart. Should you always encourage the opening lead? If dummy also has a doubleton heart, it will only be a good idea for partner to play the king of hearts and a third heart if you can overruff dummy. If, however, your trumps are too low, it will be better to discourage the opening lead.
- Once again defending a spade contract, partner leads the ♥A and, as East, you can see the cards in layout 2 (top of next column). How should you signal? If you encourage with the nine of hearts, West will likely play the king of hearts followed by a third heart. Even if South follows to the third round of hearts, you may no longer win two diamond tricks.

Layout 2	
♠ K Q 7	
♥ 8 5 3	
♦ K 5	
♣ A K Q J 6	
	♠ 9 5 4
	♥ Q 9 2
	♦ A Q 7 3
	♣ 10 7 3

However, if you discourage with the heart two, West should switch to diamonds (dummy's weakest suit after hearts), and you can win your ♦A-Q before reverting to hearts.

Should the opening leader always defend in line with partner's signal?

It is important to appreciate that signals work best when used as a means of providing information rather than giving commands. So, it will not always be necessary to receive a signal to determine the best line of defence. If the opening leader holds ♥A-K-Q, he will lead the ace of hearts and partner will not surprisingly discourage. This does not mean that the opening leader should automatically change suit. It is simply the third player's way of saying that he cannot win the third round of the suit. However, if dummy has three low cards, the opening leader can win the third trick himself, and does not need his partner to tell him what to do!

If however, the opening leader held ♥A-K-J, then his partner's discouragement would mean that switching suit would be a very good idea, as continuing with the king would promote declarer's queen of hearts (if declarer holds three or more cards in the suit).

Why are Attitude signals most useful when partner leads a high card?

If the opening leader starts with a low card, it will be necessary for the third player to try to win the trick, and it will therefore not be possible to give a signal.

If declarer starts the trick, then there is an assumption that this suit will not usually be the best suit for the defenders to continue playing, so it is more useful to give another form of signal, which we shall cover in the next issue. □

CLUB PLAYER'S BIDDING QUIZ

ON each of the following problems, you are West. What should you bid with each hand on the given auction?

Julian Pottage gives the correct answers on page 44.

Hand 1	W	N	E	S
♠ 10 8 6				1♠
♥ A K 10 8 5 4	?			
♦ 7				
♣ Q 7 4				

Hand 2	W	N	E	S
♠ K J 10 4 2				1♦
♥ J	?			
♦ 9 2				
♣ A Q J 10 5				

Hand 3	W	N	E	S
♠ Q				1♠ Pass
♥ 4	?			
♦ A K J 5 2				
♣ A K 10 6 4 3				

Hand 4	W	N	E	S
♠ 7 6 3 2	Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass
♥ A K 10 9 8	1♥	Pass	3♦	Pass
♦ J 9	?			
♣ Q J				

Hand 5	W	N	E	S
♠ A K 3			Pass	Pass Pass
♥ A Q J	?			
♦ A Q J				
♣ K Q 10 9				

Hand 6	W	N	E	S
♠ A 9 5	1NT	Pass	2♦*	2♣
♥ A J 10 7	?			
♦ A J 8				
♣ 10 9 3				

*Transfer to hearts



David Bakhshi

The count signal

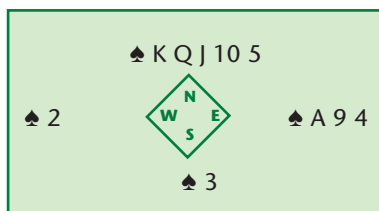
LAST time we began our series on defensive carding by looking at the Attitude signal. This month we move on to another very common form of signal – the Count signal.

Why do we need an alternative to attitude signals?

We concluded last time with the thought that if declarer starts the trick, then there is an assumption that our attitude will be 'known', so it will usually be more useful to give a different message to our partner. The next most important piece of information often relates to the number of cards held in the suit which has been led – hence we can provide a distributional or count signal.

Count signals

The classic example of the need to give a count signal occurs when defending a no-trump contract in which dummy has a long suit which declarer is seeking to establish, yet there are no outside entries to the dummy. In these cases, it is often crucial that the defenders win their trick at the point where declarer has run out of cards in dummy's long suit:



When declarer leads the three to dummy's ten, East has to decide when to win with his ace. If South has two cards in the suit, East does best to win on the second round of the suit. However, if South has three cards, it is important to hold on to the ace until the third round in order to prevent

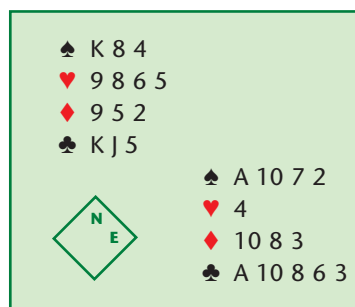
declarer from winning four tricks in the suit. How can East know how many cards the remaining players hold in the suit?

The standard way to signal one's distribution is to play a high card to show an even number of cards in the suit led, or a low card to show an odd number of cards (HELO). Those that employ 'reverse' or 'upside-down' signals exchange the same meanings in the opposite way: a high card shows an odd number of cards, while a low card would show an even number of cards.

Thus in the example above, playing standard signals, West's play of the two indicates of an odd number of cards (one or three), so East does best to win the second round of the suit (South has two or four cards).

Are count signals only useful against no-trump contracts?

Count signals can also be useful when defending against trump contracts, as they allow the defenders to communicate about the potential to trump declarer's winners. The default position for many partnerships is to play that attitude signals have first priority, but once an attitude signal has been given, or in cases where attitude is 'known' (either because an attitude signal has previously been given, or because declarer is attacking the suit), then the defenders revert to count.



What would be the most useful type of signal in the layout above? You are

defending against a 4♥ contract (the opponents bid 1♥ – 2♥ – 4♥), and partner, West, leads the queen of diamonds (top of a sequence).

Declarer wins the first trick in his own hand with the ace of diamonds, and leads the queen of clubs. How should you defend, as East? It looks as if declarer is trying to establish at least one discard (to throw a potential diamond loser), before losing the lead in trumps. If he has the singleton queen of clubs, you can win with your ace immediately, but if he has ♣Q-x, with no other immediate entry to the dummy, he will be hoping that you win with your ace on the first round (thereby allowing him to cross to dummy in clubs). It is therefore crucial to know partner's count in clubs. How can he anticipate this?

When declarer leads a suit, there is a presumption that the defenders' attitude will be 'known'. This will clearly be the case in an instance such as this one where all of the outstanding club honours can be seen, and the only information of interest will be whether East should win with his ace of clubs. Thus, if West follows with the club two on the first round, East can infer that South has the club queen doubleton, and does best to win with the club ace on the second round. This would be crucial if South held:

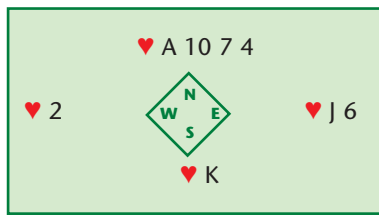
♠ Q 6 ♥ K Q J 7 3 2 ♦ A K 4 ♣ Q 4

So, if the opponents are playing in a trump contract and declarer plays on a side suit, the defenders can still signal their distribution. This is also important in case a ruff can be taken by the defenders (note: it is often the case that it is wiser not to advertise their length to declarer if trumps have already been drawn).

Should one ever signal distribution with an honour card?

Signalling with an honour is unwise when giving count, as it is usually better to

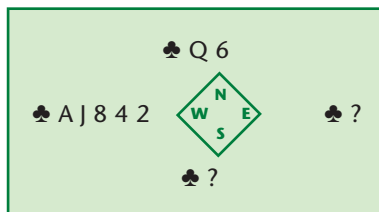
retain such high cards in suits which declarer is attacking. For example:



South, the declarer, leads the king and West plays the two. In this case, it would be both unwise and unnecessary to play the jack on the first round. West does not need to know that East has a doubleton, and if South holds ♥K-8-5-3, playing the jack will allow declarer to win four tricks in the suit by leading to the ten on the second round, while playing low ensures that the defenders will win a trick with the jack or queen.

Should count signals ever take priority over attitude signals?

Though attitude signals are typically the most useful trick-one signals, there are occasions where count signals are particularly helpful. Consider the following problem:



You are West, defending a 3NT contract played by South, and, playing fourth highest, lead the club four at trick one. Declarer wins trick one with dummy's queen, then attacks another suit in which you gain the lead. How should you continue?

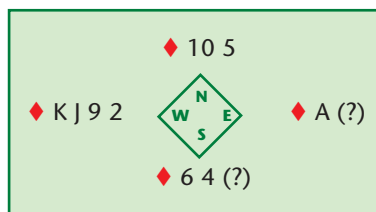
It is fair to assume that declarer holds the king. If he started with ♣K-x, you can play the ace and cash three more tricks in the suit, but if he started with ♣K-x-x, it is necessary to get partner on lead to play through declarer's remaining ♣K-x. Given that partner could not beat the queen at trick one, his attitude is 'known'. Hence, it is more useful for him to give a count signal at trick one. If he shows an odd number of clubs, you can work out that declarer's king will not fall under your ace.

A second instance in which count signals can be especially useful is when

you are seeking to 'cash out' against high level contracts. Say the opponents are playing at the five or six level after a competitive auction. It is often the case that you need to know how many tricks you can cash in one of your 'long' suits. Thus, a useful agreement is that once the opponents are playing at the five level or higher, then the lead of an ace still asks for attitude, while the lead of a king asks for count. So, when holding ace-king of a long suit, you can lead the king to discover how many winners you can cash in the suit. (It is worth noting that some partnerships extend this principle so that they give count on the lead of the king at any level (*see the February 2011 Debate*), but I prefer to save this agreement for higher levels, as I believe that attitude signals are usually more helpful at lower levels.

Do count signals only occur on the first round of the suit?

Unlike attitude signals, it can be helpful to give distributional signals on the second round of a suit. Consider the following example:



You are defending a 3NT contract played by South, and your opening lead is the two of diamonds (playing fourth highest). East wins trick one with the ace, and returns the suit. You win with the jack (declarer plays low on the first two rounds) and have to decide how to continue.

If South started with Q-x-x, playing the king now is best, but if South had Q-x-x-x, it is necessary to get partner on lead to play a third round through declarer's remaining ♦Q-x. Again, the key is for East to show distribution on the second round of the suit. How does he do this? The 'standard' way is for him to give 'standard remaining count'. Thus he returns *top of a remaining doubleton* or *his original fourth highest* if he began with four or more cards. So, in this case, a return of the ♦8 (say) would show a remaining doubleton, while a return of the ♦3 would show that East has three cards remaining in the suit.

This principle of giving 'remainder' count is also useful when discarding (to which we will return later in this series). □

CAPTION COMPETITION



After failing to draw the last trump, Alan decided not to wait for the post mortem.

THE winner of our February competition, with the caption above, is Fraser McLeod of Eastleigh, who will receive a charming Victoriana bridge mug from our sponsors, Bridge and Golf Gifts Direct (see page 11). Other good captions were: *Wait, Deep Finesse says you can't make it on a trump lead!* (Peter Hawkes, Oxon); *Stop before you jump!* (George Pilcher, Kent); *Do you think we should call the director?* (Hilary Childs, Essex); *Don't jump, we won't have a four!* (Michael Harris, East Sussex); *Don't do it Dave, I'll stop reversing on 15 points!* (Dave Workman, Berks); *Don't go for the drop!* (Judith Moore, Notts); *But Brian, everyone revokes!* (Paul Quinn, Norfolk); and *Don't jump, there's only one board left to play!* (Ron Beazley, Essex).

The cartoon for our new competition is below. Please send your bridgy captions (multiple entries accepted) to the Editor, *English Bridge*, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR or by e-mail to elena@ebu.co.uk not later than 20th April 2011. **Don't forget to include your full postal address!**



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David Bakhshi

Suit Preference Signals


SO far, I have considered two common types of signal: the attitude signal, and the count signal. Let's now move on to the third most common category, the suit preference signal. In this article, I shall discuss the basic idea and uses of suit preference signals. Further applications of this type of signal will be discussed separately.

What are suit preference signals?

In contrast to attitude and count signals, suit preference signals are used to give information about suits other than the one in which the signal is given. The basic idea is that there is an assumption that the suit in which the signal is given is one which the defenders will not be pursuing, hence creating the need to give information about which suit should be played instead.

When do they apply?

The most common situation in which suit preference signals occur involves the case where a defender is playing a suit which he expects his partner to trump (*see Example A*). In such cases, it will often be necessary to inform partner which suit to return in order to be given a second opportunity to score a ruff.

Example A	
♠	K Q J 7 5
♥	A J 8 4
♦	J 4
♣	J 4
♠	2
♥	10 7 3
♦	Q 9 7 5
♣	Q 9 7 5 3
	

North opens 1♠, South responds 2♥, North raises to 3♥ and South bids 4♥.

West leads the two of spades, dummy plays the jack. East wins with the ace of spades and returns a spade which West trumps. What should West play at trick three?


Without any form of signalling, West's decision would be a complete guess. However, if East could anticipate West ruffing the second round of spades, he would have the perfect chance to inform West which suit he would prefer him to return to receive a second ruff.

In a scenario such as this, East should assume that West's lead of dummy's first bid suit is a singleton. Thus, when he wins with the ace of spades, he will likely have the choice of returning a relatively low or a relatively high spade. The significance of the card that he chooses works in the

following way: given that West will be expected to trump the second spade, he will be unable to return a spade. It is also assumed that his partner will not wish him to return a trump. Therefore, when making a suit preference signal, East can either ask for diamonds (the *higher* ranking of the remaining suits) or clubs (the *lower* ranking of the remaining suits). The 'standard' way to do this is for a *low* spade to ask for the lower ranking suit, and a *high* spade to ask for the higher ranking suit.

Are suit preference signals only useful against trump contracts?

Since suit preference signals are an effective means of communicating where a defender's side suit entry lies, the principles can also be extended to no-trump contracts. The key is to identify when they will be more useful than either of the other two types of signals we have discussed. Consider the following situation (*Example B*):

Example B	
♠	10 7 3
♥	K J 4
♦	A Q J 9 4
♣	Q 6
	
♠	K 2
♥	9 7 6 5
♦	K 5 3
♣	10 8 5 3

South opens 1NT (12-14), and North raises to 3NT. West leads the five of spades.

Declarer plays low from the dummy at trick one. East plays the king of spades which wins the trick, then returns the two of spades. West wins with the ace of spades

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and returns a third spade. Declarer follows with the jack of spades at trick two, then wins with the queen of spades at trick three. He leads the ten of diamonds at trick four, and plays low from the dummy. East can win the king of diamonds, but then has to decide which suit to play in the hope that his partner can regain the lead to cash his last two spade winners. How should he decide which suit to try?

Again, this situation represents a complete guess without the use of signals. The third round of spades is the point at which West is free to signal. There is no need to give an attitude signal (he is 'known' to have led from a long suit), or a count signal (it is unlikely to matter to East whether West started with four or five spades). It would, however, be very useful to know the suit in which West holds an entry to his remaining spades in the event that East is the first defender to gain the lead. Thus, West can apply the principle of the suit preference signal. The only difference is that in a trump contract there are only two suits to choose between, while no-trump contracts can theoretically involve three suits. In *Example B*, however, East can assume that West will not wish to signal for a diamond return (dummy's strong suit). West can thus play a *low* spade at trick three to show a *preference* for clubs (the lower ranking suit), or a *high* spade to show an interest in hearts (the higher ranking suit).

How does one determine which type of signal will be most useful?

We will return to further applications of the suit preference signal but, in essence, they are most useful in situations where a defender wishes to communicate information relating to the suit in which an entry is held. The need to find this entry varies depending on the type of contract being defended. Against trump contracts, it is useful to show where an entry lies to enable additional ruffs to be delivered, while defending against no-trump contracts it can be necessary to signal the suit in which an entry lies to enable a defender to cash the winners which he has just generated.

It should be noted that these are specific situations which require a particular signal and occur in cases where neither attitude nor count signals would need to take priority. In order for a partnership to develop effective agreements, it is crucial to be clear which type of signal takes priority in any given situation.

IN A NUTSHELL

by Jeremy Dhondy

ALERTING – A SIMPLE GUIDE

What is alerting?

A procedure to let your opponents know of agreements that you and your partner have.

How do I alert?

Use the alert card. Tap the table if you are not using bidding boxes. It is your responsibility to make sure *both* your opponents have seen the alert.

What should I alert?

- You alert partner's bids, not your own.
- You alert bids up to and including 3NT. You do *not* alert any bids above this level *except* for opening bids.
- You alert bids where you have an agreement with partner that the opponents need to know about.
- There are regulations for alerting doubles and the magazine for June 2010 contained these regulations. A copy is also on the EBU website.
- You do *not* alert any play of the cards.

Must I alert?

Yes. Alerting, where required, is compulsory.

When should I announce instead of alerting?

Announcing is a form of alerting. See

the August 2010 magazine, or look at the EBU website for details. You only announce in the following situations:

- A natural opening bid of 1NT.
- Stayman in response to a natural 1NT opener.
- Red suit transfers in response to a natural 1NT opener.
- Opening Two of a Suit bids that are natural whatever their strength.

What happens if there is no alert?

The opponents are entitled to assume that you have no agreement that would place the bid in an alertable category.

What happens if I am not sure if a bid is alertable?

If you are not sure but are going to act as if it is, then you should alert. As a general principle it is better to alert if you are not sure.

What should I say if I am asked about an alert?

Give the explanation of your agreement. Do *not* say: 'I am taking it as. . .' This gives your partner information to which he is not entitled.

What happens if I forget to alert?

Your opponents may be damaged. The director should be called to sort it out. He will decide whether the opponents have suffered damage or not.

THE EBU'S 75th ANNIVERSARY QUIZ

Result and answers

The winner of £100 in EBU prize vouchers is Mrs Pauline Ballard of Maidstone, Kent.

Answers: 1. Robert Sheehan; 2. Membership Development Action Group; 3. CAB (Two Clubs, Aces and Blackwood); 4. Baroness Henig of Lancaster; 5. Gerald and Stuart Tredinnick; 6. 1956; 7. Ely Culbertson, *Contract Bridge Complete* (1 point for each); 8. 1928; 9. Kempson; 10. Maurice Harrison-Gray, *Contract Bridge Journal* (1 point for each); 11. 1940s; 12. Sally Brock, Sandra Landy, Nicola Smith (Gardener), Pat Davies (1 point for each player); 13. David Price; 14. 1950; 15. Canon Basil H. Davis; 16. Hubert Phillips; 17. Leslie Dodds; 18. 1974; 19. Pembury School in Kent; 20. China; 21. A National Bridge Awareness Day in the York Railway Museum.



Discarding

Part I



David Bakhshi

HAVING considered the three basic forms of signals – the attitude signal, the count signal and the suit-preference signal, let's turn to the issue of discarding. This time I will focus on the methods employed by many expert partnerships, and in the next article I shall examine those preferred by many club players.

Is discarding different to signalling?

Though many people treat them differently, the choice of card that one discards constitutes a form of signal. The distinction being that discards are signals made when throwing away, and therefore occur at a point where more information is typically available to the partnership.

How can the principles of attitude, count and suit-preference signals be applied to discarding?

This is the area which sees the greatest diversity between the approaches employed by experts and club players. Most expert partnerships tend to treat signalling as an exchange of information and rely on their powers of logical reasoning and deduction to work out the best line of defence. Thus, when discarding, the primary signal of choice is the attitude signal. Example A illustrates a classic use of such a discard:

Example A	
♠ J 6	
♥ J 6	
♦ A K Q 3	
♣ K J 10 9 2	
	♠ 9 7 5 3
	♥ A K Q 10
	♦ 10 8 6 4
	♣ 8

South opens 1NT, and North raises to 3NT. West leads the ♣5; dummy plays the ♣2; East plays the ♣8 and South wins with the ♣Q. South next leads the ♣4; West wins with the ♣A, and East throws . . . ?

Playing standard signals, East can either throw a low spade or a low diamond to *discourage* those suits, or he can throw a high heart to *encourage* a switch to hearts. Which is the best card to choose? While it may seem that throwing an encouraging heart makes it easy for partner to switch to your best suit, this is at a great cost. This dilemma is made clearer if you ask: 'Is it better to throw a winner or a loser?'

It is clearly desirable to retain your winning cards, so you should prefer to discourage alternative switches. To achieve this, use the fact that dummy is visible to both defenders. In the case of Example A, it is clear that East cannot want a switch to diamonds, so West will choose between the major suits. If East can eliminate spades as a good option, then West should deduce that East wants him to switch to hearts. The best discard is therefore the ♠3. Throwing a low spade eliminates spades, and in effect shows heart strength without having to throw a heart winner.

Is it ever useful to give count signals when discarding?

We have previously seen that the preferred order of priority involves count as a secondary signal. The count signal being most useful when declarer leads a suit, or when a player's attitude is already 'known'. This last principle can be extended to discarding. Consider the situation that arises in Example B:

Example B	
♠ 8 5	
♥ A Q 3	
♦ K Q J 10 9 8	
♣ Q 5	
	♠ K 7 6 2
	♥ J 7 4
	♦ 6
	♣ K 9 8 6 3

South's 1NT opening is raised to 3NT, and West leads the ♠4.

Dummy plays low at trick one; East plays the ♠K and South wins with the ♠A. Declarer leads a diamond to dummy's ♦8 at trick two, then continues diamonds at trick three. What should East discard?

This is a situation in which one can anticipate a fairly common dilemma for West. If he holds the ♦A and ♠Q-10-x-x or ♠Q-10-x-x-x, knowing how many spades East holds (and as a result how many spades are held by declarer) will make a huge difference to him. If declarer has the ♠J-x remaining, it will be necessary to find a way to put East on lead so that East can lead a spade through declarer. However, if declarer has just the ♠J left, it could be crucial for West to cash his spades immediately. It is therefore most useful to give a *count* signal.

When giving count in a suit which has already been played, the most common approach is to give *remaining count*, i.e. to tell partner how many cards you have left in that suit. The standard approach is to throw high from an even number and low from an odd number. So, in Example B, East should throw the ♠2, to show an odd number remaining (or an original even number of spades). If West started with five spades, he will now know that declarer has only one spade left, and that the suit is ready to run if he holds the ♠Q.

Are suit-preference signals useful when discarding?

Many expert partnerships consider the appropriate use of attitude and count signals to be sufficient for effective communication when discarding, and save suit-preference signals for the situations discussed in my last article. However, it is possible to make use of suit-preference signals when discarding, and the ways in which this is typically done will be something I will consider next time. □



David Bakhshi

Discarding

Part II

IN my October article I began looking at discarding, discussing the application of attitude and count signals when throwing away. This time I shall examine alternative discarding methods which primarily involve the suit-preference signal.

How can suit-preference signals be used when discarding?

The basic idea of the suit-preference signal is that the choice of card played can be used to show an interest in a suit either higher or lower ranking than the one being played. This idea can be therefore be applied to discarding. Consider Example A from the October issue:

Example A	
♠ J 6	
♥ J 6	
♦ A K Q 3	
♣ K J 10 9 2	
	♠ 9 7 5 3
	♥ A K Q 10
	♦ 10 8 6 4
	♣ 8

South opens 1NT, and North raises to 3NT.

West leads the five of clubs, dummy plays the two, East plays the eight and South wins with the queen of clubs. South next leads the four of clubs, West wins with the ace, and East throws . . . ?

I explained that playing standard signals East would do best to throw a discouraging spade, relying on West to figure out that he cannot want a diamond switch, and therefore has heart strength. Using suit-preference discards, East conveys the same message by discarding from a suit he does not wish his partner to play, but throws a low card to show interest in the lower

ranking of the remaining suits and a high card to show an interest in the higher ranking suit. Thus, in example A, East would either throw a low diamond or a high spade to show strength in hearts. This idea was put forward by Hy Lavinthal in the 1960s, and is often known as *McKenney* after the writer who promoted its usage.

Are there any problems with this approach?

There are a couple of negative issues. One is common to all forms of signalling in that recognising a card as high or low may not be easy since it is the relative value of the card that is important. So, in Example A, if East's diamonds were 9-8-7, then throwing the seven of diamonds may not clearly be seen as an attempt to throw a low diamond. Likewise, if his spades were 4-3-2, then throwing the four of spades may not clearly be seen as a 'high' spade.

The second problem is that when seeking to request a switch to a higher ranking suit, it is always necessary to throw a high card, and this may not always be possible (or desirable).

Can these problems be overcome?

An alternative approach is to use a system of discarding called *Revolving Discards*. Though based on similar principles of suit preference, these work in a slightly different way. The main idea necessary to understand this system is that the suits are considered to be part of a cycle, with clubs lying above spades, spades above hearts, hearts above diamonds and diamonds above clubs. When making a discard, a high card shows interest in the suit above, and a low card expresses interest in the suit below. Thus, in Example A, East would throw either a high diamond or a low spade to show strength in hearts.

The advantages of this approach are that a player making a discard can show strength in any suit, and also has a choice whether to use a high card to ask for the suit above or a low card to ask for the suit below, thereby avoiding the issue that occurs when holding inappropriate cards for a regular suit-preference signal.

However, the downsides are that it is not possible to signal for a suit by throwing a card in that suit, and it is also very hard to make a neutral discard, since in theory, all cards convey an interest in another suit.

Are there any other variations on the theme of suit-preference signals when discarding?

Rather than relying on a player distinguishing strength according to the value of the card thrown, the final category of discards take into account whether the value of the card thrown is odd or even. The most common of these are often referred to as *Italian Discards*.

The basic idea is that an odd card is encouraging in the suit thrown, whilst an even card carries a suit-preference meaning. For example, if spades have been led, then throwing the five of diamonds would encourage a switch to diamonds, whilst throwing the four of diamonds (a low even card) would show an interest in clubs, and throwing the eight of diamonds (a high even card) would show an interest in hearts.

So, in Example A, East could not signal for hearts by throwing a spade (he only has odd cards in spades). Holding only even cards in diamonds, however, he could show an interest in hearts (the lower of the remaining suits) by throwing the four of diamonds.

This raises the main problem with this method, which is that a player seeking to make a discard may not always have a card of the appropriate value with which to make a signal. In example A, if East's diamonds had also been odd cards, he ↻

HESITATING

Is there anything wrong in hesitating during the auction?

Generally no, unless you do it deliberately to put the opposition off. Sometimes you need to hesitate, for example if your opponent has made a Stop bid. Sometimes you will hesitate because you have a difficult problem. In such circumstances you can communicate information to partner that he should not have and must not use.

Should I try to avoid hesitating?

If you can then yes, unless it is mandatory (e.g. after a Stop bid by your right-hand opponent, see above) but this is easier said than done especially, for example, with high-level decisions.

I hesitated during the auction and my opponent called the director and said I should be fined for this.

I rather hope the director told him off. First of all it is not an offence to hesitate and secondly it is not the job of the opponent to decide who should be fined.

If I hesitate, what constraints does this put on partner?

If you hesitate and this conveys infor-

mation to partner, then he must not act on it. Suppose you double slowly in a competitive auction after some thought. Partner will be in possession of the information that you do not have three or four trump tricks but he has come by this information only as a result of the tempo of the auction. He may not use this information to assist his final decision.

So what can partner do?

After you have hesitated, partner may not choose, from logical alternatives, one that is suggested by the pause. Generally this means that partner may choose a clearcut action. A director will decide using Law 16B 1 (b). If a significant proportion of a player's peers would have considered the action complained of (say, about 80%) and some of those would have actually chosen it, then the director is likely to allow the action.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a hesitation does *not* preclude you from doing something that is obvious.

In most circumstances directors will consult other players and directors to help them decide.

⇒ would have no way of signalling for hearts. This can be particularly problematic in creating ethical dilemmas. With only odd cards in the remaining suits, it is likely that East would take longer to select a discard. This causes a potential problem for West, who must not allow his decision process to be affected by the time taken for East to choose a card, and must instead base his decision on the value of the card thrown (i.e. he should aim to interpret the card thrown irrespective of the time taken to make that choice).

The final variation on this theme involves a system of discards called *Dodds*. In this method, a discard of an even card is encouraging in that suit, whilst an odd card is both discouraging in that suit, and encouraging in the other suit of the same colour. Though this method is popular amongst club players, I have never seen it

used by an expert partnership. Apart from the fact that it is confusing to describe (and I imagine even more confusing to play), it has the obvious disadvantage that it is very restrictive in nature. In essence, to encourage a switch to a red suit, for example, it is necessary to throw an odd card in the other red suit. As with Odd/Even Discards, this approach is very difficult to handle without placing ethical pressure on partner when faced with impossible choices which result in plays at an irregular tempo.

In summary then, there are various approaches which make use of suit-preference principles when discarding. However, each has its own inherent problems, in addition to the fact that all are by nature more complex than the more natural Attitude approach favoured by most top players. □

CLUB PLAYER'S BIDDING QUIZ

ON each of the following problems, you are West. What should you bid with each hand on the given auction?

Julian Pottage gives his answers on page 44.

Hand 1	W	N	E	S
♠ 7 6 5			1♦	Pass
♥ A 10 3	?			
♦ K Q 8				
♣ J 8 3 2				

Hand 2	W	N	E	S
♠ K J 10				1♥
♥ K 6 3	?			
♦ K 7 5 3				
♣ A 5 4				

Hand 3	W	N	E	S
♠ Q 5 4				1NT Pass
♥ A 9 4 3	2♣*	Pass	2♦	Pass
♦ A 10 8 7 6	?			
♣ A				

* Stayman

Hand 4	W	N	E	S
♠ K Q J 10 8	1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
♥ A K 7 2	?			
♦ K 2				
♣ 7 4				

Hand 5	W	N	E	S
♠ Q 6 4			1♠	2♦
♥ A J 8	?			
♦ 10 4 2				
♣ 7 6 5 4				

Hand 6	W	N	E	S
♠ J 10 9 8			1♠	Dble
♥ A	?			
♦ 10 9 7 5 4				
♣ Q 10 5				