

Basic Defensive Strategies III

Signalling Attitude, Part 3

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Last article we discussed signalling attitude, and the important part that communication between the defenders hands. We will continue the communication theme when we discuss count signals in May. But for now, let's continue our attitude review.

The Intersection between Attitude and Suit Preference

When we signal encouragement we play the lowest spot card that we have in the suit. It is easy when it is a deuce. But what if your holding is K987. You signal with the seven, but it looks like a high spot.

Remember, that the key takeaway is that the spots are **relative to each specific hand**. If dummy has 5432 in a suit, then the 7 looks low.

When discouraging the same rules and thinking applies. You want to make a signal as clear as possible when discouraging, playing the highest spot **you can afford**. So if your holding is 987, don't signal discouragement with the 8, do it with the 9.

However do not signal with a spot that may cost a trick.

Example 1:

West North East South

1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass

4♠ All Pass

Partner leads the ♣9. Dummy has:

♠AJ85

♥K832

♦98

♣J64

Your hand is

♠42

♥AQJ3

♦1062

♣Q1083

You are dying for a heart lead, so do you discourage a club continuation, by playing the 10 or 8? If you do, you just gave declarer their unmakeable contract. Declarer has:

♠KQ1076

♥74

♦K2

♣AK75

If you squander a high club, declarer can now pick up the whole club suit, and pitch a diamond on the 4th club, losing only a diamond and two hearts. Your ♣3 will initially confuse partner, but they will thank you for the thoughtful play.

Negative attitude signalling and Suit preference

Although you want to make your negative signal clear, sometimes you can give partner two messages:

1. You don't like the lead, and
2. Your spot card may indicate which side suit you are more interested in.

The most common instant where this applies is when the defender is known to have a long suit, thus a choice of many spots to play. A relatively very high spot, indicates interest in higher of the side suits. While a lower card, suggests partner to switch to the lower ranking suit. Here is an example to clarify how this works:

Example 2: As South, you hold ♠2 ♥KQ10754 ♦A73 ♣732.

West North East South

2♥

2♠ Pass 3♠ Pass

4♠ All Pass

Partner lead the ♥A. Dummy has

♠QJ85

♥863

♦K84

♣K84

Plan your defence.

You are hoping to score two hearts and two diamonds or perhaps three hearts and one diamond. You want partner to shift to diamonds. Discourage hearts by playing the ♥10. Partner should read the ten as wanting a diamond shift. If they don't declarer will make their game. Declarer's hand:

♠AK109743

♥J94

♦Q

♣AQ

2b) You hold ♠762 ♥QJ7532 ♦J1076 ♣-. Play the ♥5. This tells partner that you have a possible side entry in the lower of the two unbid suits. So if they only had one heart, they will switch to clubs, and your side will take the first four tricks. If they don't declarer will make their game.

Declarer's hand:

♠KQ1094

♥K104

♦-

♣AQJ105

In order to be successful here, you need to watch the spots in the heart suit.

Attitude when leading **after** trick one

This is a very important concept and can immeasurably improve your defensive success. Essentially, when defending in the middle of hand, if you or partner lead a small card, you have interest in that suit being continued, usually showing a high card. Conversely, if you lead a high spot, it shows either no interest or high card in suit led, or interest in a shift to a different suit.

