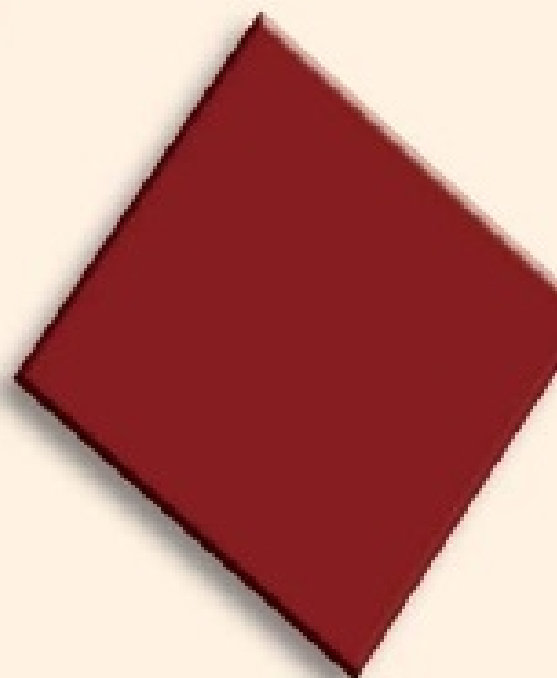


BRIDGE TECHNIQUE SERIES

DEFENSIVE SIGNALING

8



David Bird • Marc Smith

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Bridge Technique Series

Entry Management Tricks with Trumps Safety Plays Eliminations
and Throw-Ins Deceptive Card Play Planning in Suit Contracts
Planning in Notrump Contracts Defensive Signaling Squeezes Made
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Introduction

Defending is hard, very hard. Many players are good bidders and even more are superb dummy players. Few are exceptional defenders. Anyone who defends even moderately will be a regular winner.

There are three main reasons why defending is so much tougher than declaring. For a start, declarer usually holds the majority of the high cards and, in a suit contract, most of the trumps. He will therefore be on lead most of the time. He can switch tacks as it suits him. Your chances to influence the outcome of the hand as defenders will be far fewer. You will seldom have time to test the water — you or your partner will often have to find the best switch or continuation on your first attempt. It is therefore imperative that you both signal accurately so that the defender who must make the critical decision will be in possession of sufficient information.

Secondly, declarer can see his side's strengths and weaknesses. As a defender, you can see only half of yours. For example, we learn in an early lesson on declarer play to 'lead towards your strength'. As a defender, you will often not even know where that strength lies. Accurate defensive signals can provide this information.

Declarer's final advantage is that he controls both his hand and the dummy. As each of the defenders manages only half of their side's assets, they must work in tandem. It is no good, for example, if one defender is playing to force declarer while the other is trying to set up a defensive ruff — you must work as a partnership. Defensive signals are the tools that enable you to achieve this goal.

You will frequently hear players make comments along the lines of, 'I didn't signal because I didn't want to give information to declarer.' It is true that there are some situations in which a signal will

Introduction •

be of more help to declarer than it is to your partner. A good rule to follow is this: If the information might help your partner to find the best defense later in the hand, you should signal accurately.

Having established that you want to signal accurately, let's start to look at how you can signal. There are two main methods — attitude signals and count signals. To some extent, they are rival methods and you must choose between them.

The attitude signal

An attitude signal indicates whether you would like partner to continue the suit he has just led. A high spot card says that you like the suit and wish him to continue it. A low spot card denies such interest.

The count signal

A count signal gives no indication as to whether you like the suit that has been led. It merely states whether you have an even or odd number of cards in that suit. A high spot card indicates an even number of cards. A low spot card shows an odd number.

Which method is better?

It has long been generally agreed that it is best to use count signals when declarer plays a suit. He has chosen to play on this suit and it is unlikely that partner wants to know your strength there. Giving count in the played suit, however, will help partner to build up a complete count of the hand, greatly assisting his overall defense.

A decade or so ago, most players favored attitude signals when the defenders led a new suit. Things have changed! Play in a big tournament nowadays and you will find that many contestants use count signals throughout — both in declarer's suits and their own.

In this book we will start by looking closely at both attitude and count signals. We will note the situations where a particular method works well and those where it does not. In Chapter 3 we will see how you can combine the use of attitude signals and count signals, thereby getting the best of both worlds.

Hold on tight and enjoy the ride!

- Defensive Signaling

Attitude Signals

It matters little whether one starts to play bridge by attending classes, by reading books or simply by playing with friends, the first defensive signal learned by most players is the basic attitude signal. Using this method, you play a high spot card to tell partner that you like the suit he has led and a low one to tell him that you don't. This method is easy to teach, easy to learn, and easy to understand.

Look at this deal from the West position:

Both Vul. ♠ K Q 4

Dealer South ♥ 8 6 3

♦ K 5

♣ J 7 6 3 2 ♠ 7 6 3 ♠ 10 8 2 ♥ Q J 10 5 ^N ♥ K 9 2

^S

WE ♠ Q J 8 2 ♣ K 8 ♣ 9 5 ♠ A J 9 5 ♥ A 7 4

♦ A 9 ♣ A Q 10 4


WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♣
pass	3♣	pass	5♣
all pass			

South gives you a chance, by bidding the club game instead of 3NT, and you lead the queen of hearts. Declarer wins with the ace, crosses to dummy with the king of spades, and plays a club to the queen and your king. How do you continue?

Chapter 1 — Attitude Signals •

The answer is that you cannot tell. It is an unfair question because we have not given you the vital piece of the jigsaw — which heart partner played at Trick 1. Playing attitude signals, partner would have signaled encouragement with the nine of hearts. Placing him with the king of hearts, you would continue that suit to beat the game. A misguided switch to diamonds would allow declarer to throw one of dummy's hearts on his spade suit.


Suppose instead that partner had played a discouraging two of hearts at Trick 1. You would then switch to the queen of diamonds, hoping that he held the ace. Perhaps the full hand would be something like:

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

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

Partner's attitude signal enables you to place the key high cards and beat the contract in both situations.

Defending a suit contract, partner may encourage a continuation because he wants a ruff. Suppose you lead this club suit against South's contract of four hearts.

♣ A K 7 2
 ♣ Q 8 5
 ♣ 9 3
 ♣ J 10 6 4

When you lead the ace of clubs, East signals encouragement with the nine. You then cash your second winner and lead a third round of clubs for partner to ruff.

(In this chapter and the next, we assume that you lead the ace from A-K and the king from K-Q. In years gone by, many players led the king from both these holdings. It was not a good method. When partner held J-x-x he had no idea whether to encourage or not.)

•Defensive Signaling

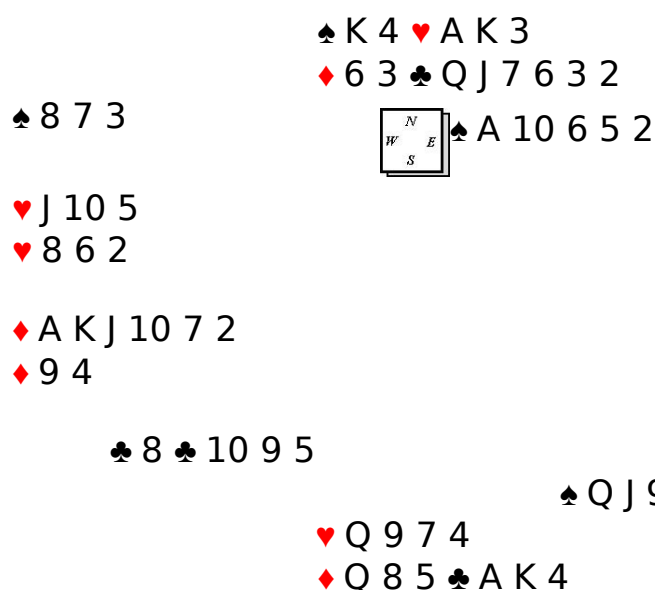
Suppose instead that this is the lie of club suit:

♣ Q 8 5
 ♣ A K 7 2
 ♣ 10 9 6 3
 ♣ J 4

Partner would play a discouraging three on the first round. You would switch elsewhere, hoping to establish the tricks that were your due before declarer set up a discard on the queen of clubs.

How effective are attitude signals when you lead the top card of

a long suit against a notrump contract? Look at this deal:



South opens a weak notrump (12-14 HCP) and is raised to game. You open proceedings with a top diamond. How do you continue if partner, playing attitude signals, follows with the four?

Partner's four of diamonds is the lowest outstanding card in the suit. He would not play a discouraging card if he held the queen, so declarer has that card. If the queen is still guarded (and only count signals could tell you whether or not it is), you must try to put partner on lead to play a second round of diamonds through the queen.

A look at dummy tells you that your partner does not have a fast heart entry. If he holds the ace of clubs, it probably won't matter what you do, so long as you don't play a second diamond. Declarer is unlikely to be able to score nine tricks without touching clubs.

The important case against a guarded queen is when the cards lie as in the diagram. Now you must switch to a spade at Trick 2. Partner will win with his ace and switch back to diamonds. You will take the first seven tricks to beat the contract by three.

Suppose that, on a different layout, partner follows with the nine of diamonds at Trick 1. The nine is the highest missing diamond apart

Chapter 1 — Attitude Signals •

from the queen. Unless the nine is singleton, partner surely has the queen of diamonds. When he holds Q-9-x, you can safely continue with a low diamond to the queen. What if partner started with Q-9 double-ton, though? On lead with the bare queen, he would have no further card in the suit to return.

Some players who use attitude signals in their own suits employ

a special method to avoid such blockages, and indeed to detect whether partner does hold an honor in the suit led. They vary which top card they lead from touching honor combinations such as A-K. For example, many Americans play that the lead of an ace against notrump requests partner to unblock any honor they hold, while the lead of a king asks for an attitude signal but not an unblock. Using this method, they would lead the ace from A-K-J-10-x, but the king from A-K-J-x (where an unblock by partner from Q-x or Q-x-x might set up declarer's 10-x-x-x). In Chapter 3 we will recommend a comprehensive system of leads, count signals and attitude signals, which gives you the best possible chance of reading the lie of the suit that has been led.

How do you know when to encourage?

When you are deciding what attitude signal to give, it is not always sufficient to look at your holding in the suit led. Look at this example:

♠ Q 6 2	♥ A Q 5				
♦ 10 7 2					
♣ Q J 10 4	♠ 10 4 ♠ 9 5				
♥ 9 8 7 3	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S
N					
W					
E					
S					
	♥ K 10 6 2				
♦ K Q 6 5					
♦ A 9 8 4					
♣ 8 7 2 ♣ A 9 5					
	♠ A K J 8 7 3				
	♥ J 4				
	♦ J 3 ♣ K 6 3				

Partner leads the ♦K against four spades. If you look only at the diamond suit, you will play an encouraging nine from the East hand. Partner may well play the ♦5 next, to your ace, and the contract can no longer be beaten! Declarer will win the return, draw trumps, and set up a heart discard on dummy's club suit.

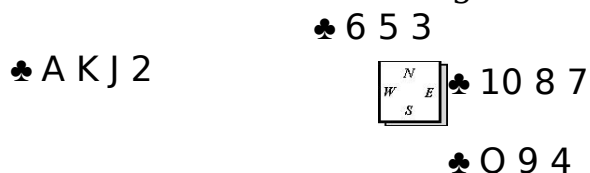
You hold the ace of diamonds, yes, but a grander view of the hand will tell you that a heart switch is needed at Trick 2. You should therefore discourage a diamond continuation by playing the four.

Which spot cards count as a high signal?

You will hear some players say, 'Any card higher than a six is encouraging; a six is neutral and a five or lower is discouraging.'

Whether you play attitude or count, any such scheme is a poor one. You can only signal with the spot cards you were dealt! If you hold 10-8-7, the seven is a low card for signaling purposes. If you hold 5-3-2, the five is a high card. Partner must make the effort to determine which spot cards are not on display in his own hand and the dummy. He should assess your signal on that basis.

To see this idea in practice, take the West cards here. You lead the ace of this club suit against a heart contract:

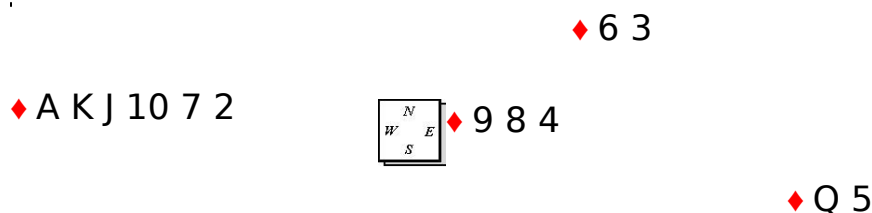


Let's say, first, that the ace draws the three, seven and four. There would not be much sense in saying, 'We play a seven as encouraging', would there? You can see the six, five, three and two; declarer has kindly produced the four. Partner's seven is the lowest spot card out and must therefore be intended as discouraging.

Now suppose that declarer is rather more cunning and follows with the nine on the first round. (He is hiding the four to make your partner's seven look like an encouraging card.) What then? It is now possible, just, that partner is signaling encouragement from Q-7-4. But only if declarer is so wonderfully clever that he has played the nine from 10-9-8! You will encounter few such declarers in your life and it is a much better bet to assume that declarer has the queen. Note that partner cannot hold something like Q-8-7-4. With that holding he would make his signal as clear as possible by playing the eight.

The limitations of attitude signals

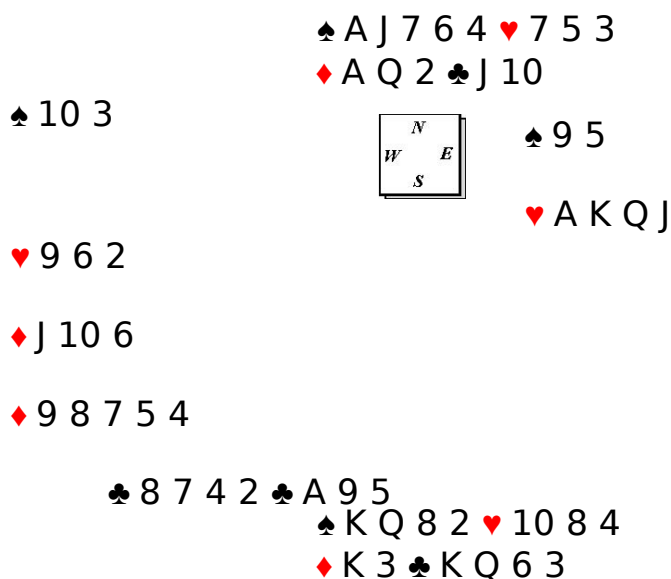
Look back briefly to the 3NT contract on page 9. In our discussion of the possible diamond positions we omitted this one:



You lead the ace and partner discourages with the four. Not much help, is it? You know that declarer holds the queen but you have no indication that it is now bare. What you needed in this case was a count signal. If you knew that partner held three diamonds, you could tell that the queen was about to fall.

There is another situation in which attitude signals offer no

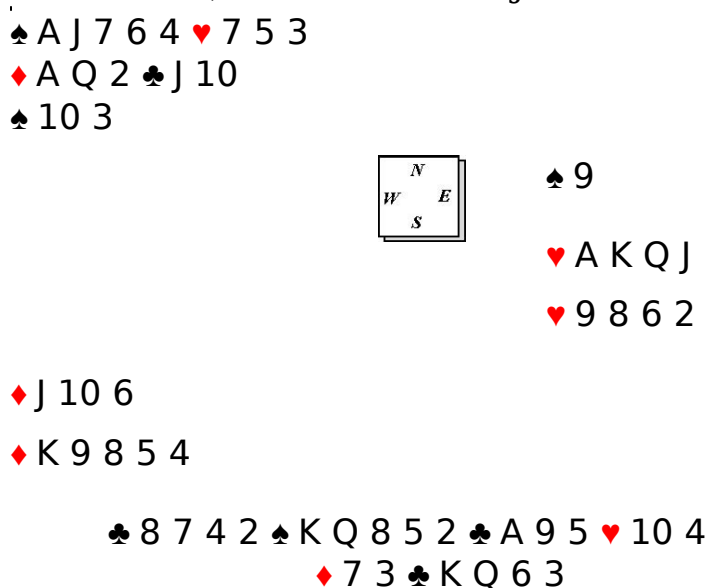
assistance — when the opening leader holds the top cards in the suit he has led. Suppose you hold the West cards on this deal:



You lead the ♥A against South's four spades and partner follows with the two. Not that his discouraging signal comes as much of a surprise — you already knew he had no heart honor. All partner's signal tells you is that he does not hold a doubleton. When you cash a second heart East plays the six. Declarer has followed with the four and the ten. What do you do at Trick 3?

As the cards lie in the diagram above, leading a third heart beats the contract easily. Declarer follows suit and partner's ace of clubs will be the fourth defensive trick.

However, the cards could just as easily lie like this:



Now you must switch to a diamond at Trick 3, setting up a fourth trick for the defense. If, instead, you play a third round of hearts, declarer will ruff, draw trumps and set up his clubs. Dummy's

diamond losers will disappear on South's club winners.

There are even some hands where a club switch would be needed at Trick 3 (if declarer's minors are $\heartsuit K-x-x-x$ and $\clubsuit Q-x$, for example). Fear ye not! By the time you have fought your way through to the end of this book, you will be able to beat the contract in all three cases.

Key points

1. When using attitude signals, you play a high spot card to tell partner that you like the suit he has led and want him to continue that suit. Following with your lowest card is discouraging.
2. In suit contracts, an encouraging signal can be made either with a doubleton or with a high honor in the suit led.
3. Attitude signals are popular because they are simple to understand. They have their limitations, however. Whether you should encourage or not is sometimes a matter of judgement. You will not guess to do the right thing every time.
4. There are several situations where an attitude signal will not tell what you need to know but a count signal would (for example, when declarer holds an honor that you might be able to drop). In the next two chapters we will see how you can get the best out of both types of signal.



QUIZ

[To Answers](#)

In each of the examples below, you have agreed to play attitude signals. (Your method is to lead the ace from A-K, the king from K-Q).

A. ♣ Q 7 6 ♣ A led



♣ 10 3 ♣ unknown

You are East, defending a major-suit game. Which card do you play when your partner leads the ace of clubs?

B. ♥ A 6 4 ♥ K led



♥ J 8 2 ♥ unknown

Which heart do you play when partner leads the king and declarer ducks from dummy if you are defending: i) a club contract? ii) a notrump contract?

C. ♦ Q 8 6 4

♦ A led



♦ J 7 5 2

♦ unknown ♠ unknown

Which diamond do you play when partner leads the ace if you are defending:

- i) a spade contract?
- ii) a notrump contract?

QUIZ



[To Answers](#)

D.

♠ A 6 4

♠ K led



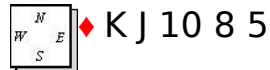
♠ 8 2

Defending a contract of four hearts, which spade would you play when partner leads the king and declarer wins with the ace if you hold:

- i) a singleton trump?
- ii) three small trumps and dummy has A-K-x-x trumps?
- iii) three small trumps and dummy has a singleton trump? Would any of your answers change if declarer had played low from dummy?

E. ♦ A 9 6

♦ Q led

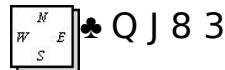


♦ unknown

Defending a notrump contract, which diamond would you play when partner leads the queen and declarer plays the six from dummy?

F. ♣ 7 6

♣ A led



♣ unknown

Defending a spade contract, which club do you play as East when your partner leads the ace?

Answers

[To Questions](#)

- A.** Play the ten, encouraging. Leading an unsupported ace is rarely a good idea and you can assume that your partner has led from the ace-king. You want him to continue the suit so that you can ruff the third round.
- B.** i) Play the eight, encouraging. Partner has led from the king-queen and you want him to continue the suit. If you discourage, he will think declarer holds the jack and will switch to avoid giving declarer a second heart trick. ii) Play the eight for the same reason. Whether you are defending a suit or a notrump contract makes no difference in this case.
- C.** i) Play the two. Although you hold an honor in the suit led, you want to warn your partner that it is dangerous for him to play the king next. It is quite likely that declarer has only a singleton diamond, in which case he will ruff the king, establishing dummy's queen for a discard in the process. Even if South holds two diamonds, it will not generally be beneficial for the defenders to cash a second round at this stage, setting up the queen. ii) Play the seven. In notrump you want partner to continue the suit.
- D.** i) Play the two. Although you have a doubleton, it is highly likely that your trump will have been drawn by the time partner regains the lead. You do not, therefore, want to encourage him to continue spades. ii) Play the two. For the same reasons as above. Although you hold three trumps this time, dummy's holding suggests that

declarer is likely to draw your trumps before partner regains the lead. iii) Play the eight. Unless declarer has revealed a solid trump suit in the bidding, the odds strongly favor your partner regaining the lead before your trumps are exhausted. Encourage your partner to cash the queen of spades at that point and, if he does not also hold the jack, to give you a third-round ruff.

If instead declarer plays low from dummy, your prime duty is to let partner know whether you hold the jack (to avoid a continuation of the suit running to declarer's jack). You would therefore discourage in all three cases.

E. Play the king. Just because you are playing some kind of signaling method, that's no excuse for not thinking. You can see that overtaking with the king will allow you to drive out dummy's ace, setting up your suit. Perhaps partner's queen is a singleton, in which case he will be unable to continue diamonds. Even if he has a second diamond, he may elect to switch for any one of a number of reasons. If you can see that continuing diamonds is the right thing to do, take control.

F. If you see advantage in gaining the lead, play the queen. This tells your partner that you also hold the jack and he can safely underlead his king of clubs at Trick 2. Otherwise play the eight to encourage partner to cash his second winner.