

FALSE ENCOURAGEMENT by Maritha Pottenger

When playing attitude as your primary response to partner's opening lead of an honor (e.g., Ace from AKxx or King from KQxx, etc.), it is sometimes appropriate to give **false encouragement**. False encouragement means that you give partner a come-on signal—high, “I like it” even when you do **not** have the other equal honor or help for partner in the suit led.

The reasons to give false encouragement are either:

- 1) You have enough trump tricks to set the contract if partner just cashes out in the suit led and does NOT switch.
- 2) You cannot stand a switch. Having partner switch suits is likely to give away more tricks than encouraging partner to simply continue with the current suit.
- 3) You desperately need partner to switch to a different suit, e.g., you hold AQ10 behind KJx in Dummy.

As an example, if the opponents have bid to 4H (with Declarer promising a 6-card suit) and your partner leads the Ace of spades (promising King). Dummy has: xxx xxxx AQJ AKQ and you hold: xxx AK 10xxx Jxxx. Clearly there is no future in diamonds or clubs, but you have two trump tricks. If partner's second spade cashes, you will set the contract. You should give false encouragement to partner to guarantee a set whenever Declarer has two spades. If partner shifts, Declarer could get rid of a losing spade on good diamonds or clubs before pulling trumps.

As another example, your partner leads Ace (promising King) of spades against 4H.

Dummy has: Jxx 987x A108x AQ and you hold: 9842 102 xxx xxxx. If partner breaks diamonds or clubs, that can only help Declarer. You have no tricks to contribute. If Declarer has the Queen of spades, s/he can develop another spade trick anyway (with Jack in dummy), so continuing spades cannot hurt. A shift by partner could be very damaging to your side. Give partner false encouragement with the 9 of spades.

Since false encouragement is always an option, when you do discourage partner with your first card, it strongly suggests a shift. Furthermore, when **suggesting a shift**, a low card (attitude—“I don't like it”) **should guarantee that you have control of any long suit that is a possible threat in dummy.** (Otherwise, having partner shift could mean that partner's 2nd trick in a suit goes away on dummy's long suit.) As an example: Dummy has xx Axx AQ KQJ10xx and partner leads the Ace of spades (promising King). If you have the King of diamonds AND the Ace of clubs, give partner a LOW spade—asking for a shift. Partner must trust you to hold the Ace of clubs and shift to a diamond (to set up any diamond trick to which your side is entitled BEFORE the clubs are set up). When you get in with the Ace of clubs, you can cash the King of diamonds and lead to your partner's King of spades for down 1. If you hold ONLY the King of diamonds and DO NOT HAVE the Ace of clubs, you should give false encouragement to partner on the 1st spade and then your highest spade (to ask for shift to highest side suit which is diamonds rather than clubs) to ask for a diamond shift. Otherwise, Declarer's second spade loser might go away on all those clubs.

Another example: Partner led Ace of diamonds (promising King) against 3H and Dummy had: Ax Axx xxx Q108xx. I gave partner my lowest diamond (attitude—please shift—which should also promise that I have clubs, the threat suit in dummy, under control). My partner didn't believe me and cashed a second diamond, setting up Declarer's queen. If partner plays anything else, I eventually get in to lead a diamond through and we get 3 diamond tricks and 2 club tricks. My hand: Qxxx xxx J10x AJ9. (Partner's hand is J10xxx xx AKxx xx, so we can only make 2 spades (which we bid) and must beat 3H to get a plus on the board.

If dummy is fairly balanced (no threat suit), then a low card (attitude) on the first trick just says you don't like it and suggests a shift. You don't promise anything in particular beyond that. Partner has to use logic, the bidding, his/her hand, and Dummy's cards to figure out the most promising suit for a shift. Remember: **you canNOT give attitude & suit preference on same trick**. Discouraging attitude is NOT suit preference for clubs! Discouraging attitude simply tells partner to THINK and figure out the best shift on the available information.