

DEFENSIVE SIGNALS by Maritha Pottenger

When you are defending, you and your partner can exchange information with every card you play—if you pay attention. The **standard** signals you can use are [upside down reverse much of this]:

- 1) **Attitude** (high—“I like it”; low—“I don’t like it.”)
- 2) **Count** (high/low—“I have an even number of cards”; low-high—“I have an odd number of cards”).
- 3) **Suit Preference** (leading a high or low card in certain situations to tell partner what suit to play back for you).

Most people play **attitude** in terms of the honor leads. If your partner leads an honor (e.g., Ace from AK; queen from QJ, etc.), a HIGH signal by you promises a TOUCHING HONOR. (For example, if partner leads Ace, promising King, a high card by you guarantees either the queen—touching honor—or a doubleton and a desire to trump the third round if you are defending a suit contract. If partner leads the King, promising the queen, a high card by you guarantees EITHER the Jack or the Ace [touching honor] or both.) If your partner’s opening lead (or lead in the middle of the hand) is small, it promises an honor in the suit (e.g., Q952, lead the 2). If you do NOT have an honor, lead HIGH, e.g., from 952, lead the 9. Standard discards also show **attitude**. In cash-out situations (now or never to get your tricks), attitude applies, e.g., you play an Ace without the King and partner signals high if s/he has the King, low if not.

Count is usually used when you are following suit to something Declarer (or Dummy) has led (and you cannot win the trick). Count is imperative in situations when partner needs to know WHEN to take an Ace. For example, suppose Dummy holds KQJ108 in diamonds and NO outside entries and the contract is 1 NT. Partner will want to take the Ace on the trick that is Declarer’s LAST diamond. If you give partner count in diamonds, s/he will be able to work it out. In other words, if Declarer has only 2 diamonds, partner will want to take the Ace on the 2nd round. If Declarer has 3 diamonds, partner will want to take the Ace on the 3rd round. Count also applies (current count) when returning partner’s suit or when attitude is known. Count and Attitude combine when you have a doubleton and signal encouragement to partner because you are hoping to get a ruff.

Suit Preference is used in 3 main situations:

- 1) when dummy makes it crystal clear (and I do mean crystal—there must be absolutely no doubt) that a shift (a suit different than your partner’s opening lead) is indicated.
- 2) When your partner gives you a ruff (or you give your partner a ruff) or you know partner wants to ruff.
- 3) When you are leading a card that you KNOW will knock out Declarer’s last stopper in NT, but will also exhaust your partner of that suit, suit preference tells partner how to get back to you.

Examples: Your partner makes (an obviously desperation) lead of the Ace of diamonds and the KQJx of diamonds show up in dummy. If spades are trumps, the two remaining suits are clubs and hearts. A HIGH diamond by you asks for a heart shift. A LOW diamond by you asks for a club shift. A middle diamond implies you have equal holdings in two suits/don’t know/don’t care/cannot do anything.

Your partner leads a card that you KNOW is a singleton club. Spades are trumps. You take the Ace of clubs and send a club back to partner to trump. A LOW club asks partner to get back to you in diamonds. A HIGH club asks partner to get back to you in hearts. (If you did not have Ace of clubs, playing a LOW club would tell partner to try to get to you in diamonds (for a club ruff). High clubs would say try hearts for your entry.

The opponents open 1NT, try Stayman with Declarer responding 2D and end up in 3NT. You lead the King of hearts from KQJ83. Partner plays a low heart. Dummy has the 45 of hearts. Declarer ducks. You lead the Queen. Declarer ducks again. Your next heart is guaranteed to knock out Declarer’s Ace. The Jack of hearts asks

partner to come back to you in spades. The 8 of hearts asks partner to come back to you in diamonds. The 3 of hearts asks partner to come back to you in clubs.

Suit preference also applies whenever attitude and count are known or irrelevant.