

Intermediate Bridge Lesson
Palo Alto Bridge Club, February 14, 2017

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Defensive Signaling Lesson 2 – Suit Preference Signals

In the prior lesson on January 17, we discussed the first two kinds of defensive signals, attitude signals (used when partner is on lead) and count signals (used when the declarer leads from hand or from the dummy). Today we address the third kind of signal, suit preference signals. These are signals that partner will use when she is on lead but can see that attitude is not important.

These are the basics for Suit Preference signals:

- For most people, suit preference signals are the most confusing signals,
- Fortunately, they are the least common signals,
- Suit preference signals tell partner directly what suit to attack when on lead,
- Suit preference signals apply when partner is leading a suit but attitude to the suit led is not important.
- The most common situation is when giving partner a ruff. Since the ruffing partner has no cards in the suit led, attitude to the suit led cannot apply. The lead of a high card asks for the return of the higher non-trump suit; a low card asks for the lower non-trump suit; and a middle card says the player giving partner a ruff has no preference.
- In addition, when partner leads a suit, and the dummy has a singleton or a void in the suit (in a suit contract), or the dummy has the A-K in the suit, so that there is no hope in continuing the suit, RHO shows suit preference. RHO plays a high spot card to suggest a switch to the higher of the other non-trump suits, or plays a low spot card to suggest a switch to the lower of the other non-trump suits. A middle card says continue or I have no preference.
- Suit preference signals point partner to side suits, not the trump suit,
- In all suit preference cases, you should give the most emphatic signal you can afford to give, so it is easy for partner to read. Play the lowest low card for the lower of the two remaining non-trump suits or the highest high card that does not jeopardize your holding in the suit for the higher non-trump suit.

Here is an example of how suit preference works: Partner opens One Heart and the opponents bid up to Four Spades. You are on lead and play your singleton heart.

(You)	(Partner)
	S: 64
H: 5	H: AK974
	D: A864
	C: K7

Partner, who has the A-K of hearts and the Ace of diamonds, would win the King of Hearts, cash the Ace of Hearts, and see that you do not have another heart. On the third lead of the suit, partner would play the H9 for you to ruff. The nine is a suit preference card telling you that she has an entry in the higher of the other two non-trump suits (her entry is in diamonds, not clubs). You should return a diamond in the hope that partner can lead another heart to you for a second ruff. If partner had returned the H4 instead of the H9, that would have been a signal for clubs. Playing the H7 would have indicated that partner had no preference.

Here are two complete hands which demonstrate the power of suit preference signals:

(1) Suit Preference Signals – Signaling an Entry When Giving Partner a Ruff:

	95		
	Q9542		
	KJ4		
	Q65		
		(Dealer)	
J108743		K2	
J3		1087	
8652		A109	
2		AK943	
			Bidding: (1C) 1NT (P) 2D (Transfer)
AQ6			(P) 2H (P) 2NT
AK6			(P) 3H All Pass
Q73			
J1087			Lead: 2 of Clubs

You are sitting East. Partner leads the C2, a singleton in the suit you opened. You win the CK, and the CA, then return the C3 for partner to ruff. The C3 is a suit preference card asking for return of a diamond, the lower of the two other non-trump suits. Partner ruffs with the H3 and leads back a diamond. You win the DA and return a fourth club. When partner ruffs with the HJ, dummy must overruff with the HQ. You hold the 1087 over the remaining 9542 in dummy so your 10 of trumps is promoted to become a winner. You take two clubs, a club ruff, one diamond, and your promoted trump, for down one. Without the suit preference signal, it is likely partner would have returned a spade from her J-10 sequence and declarer would be able to pull all the remaining trumps. Declarer would lose only two clubs, one ruff, and a diamond to make three hearts.

NOTE: Watch for trump promotions. They do come up and give you an opportunity to shine on defense!

(2) Suit Preference Signals – Signaling for a Switch When Continuing the Suit is Hopeless:

10975
KJ53
Q
KJ83

Q42	Void
107	AQ942
AKJ93	87542
752	1096

(Dealer)

AKJ863

86

106

AQ4

Bidding: 1S (P) 3S (P)

4S All Pass

Lead: Ace of Diamonds

LHO leads the Ace of Diamonds. With a singleton diamond in the dummy, RHO knows that continuing diamonds is fruitless so attitude to diamonds is not relevant. With comparable side suits in hearts and clubs in the dummy, LHO needs guidance on how to continue with the defense. RHO should give a suit preference signal, a high diamond for a heart switch, or a low diamond for partner to shift to a club. Here, RHO plays the D8, her highest diamond, asking for a heart continuation. RHO will take two heart tricks, and LHO will eventually get the Spade Queen to set the hand. If LHO leads anything other than a heart at Trick 2, declarer will pull two rounds of trumps (leaving the master trump out), ruff a diamond, and discard a losing heart on the fourth club. Declarer will lose only one spade, one heart, and one diamond to make the hand.

Final thoughts on defensive carding:

Signals are not perfect.

You may not have the right card to signal with, given your signaling system.

It takes a while to incorporate signaling into your bridge practice – don't beat up yourself or your partner along the way.

Although defense is hard, you should not give up trying to signal partner. Your signals won't work out all the time, and your signals may get crossed at first, but you and partner will find that signaling will get easier and more automatic. Over time, you will find that you are getting better scores when you are giving and interpreting your partner's defensive signals.

Good luck !

1
 ♠ Q10764
 ♥ J1062
 ♦ J
 ♣ AKQ
 ♠ J5
 ♥ 74
 ♦ 1076432
 ♣ 1097
 ♠ 932
 ♥ AK93
 ♦ A95
 ♣ 643
 ♠ AK8
 ♥ Q85
 ♦ KQ8
 ♣ J852

Dealer: North
 Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

 Opening Lead: ♥ A

2
 ♠ 94
 ♥ 7
 ♦ 106542
 ♣ K9765
 ♠ KQ653
 ♥ J1063
 ♦ KJ8
 ♣ A
 ♠ A72
 ♥ Q52
 ♦ Q9
 ♣ Q10832
 ♠ J108
 ♥ AK984
 ♦ A73
 ♣ J4

Dealer: East
 N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 ♥
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♥	Dbl
3 ♦	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

 Opening Lead: ♥ 7

3
 ♠ AJ87
 ♥ 1095
 ♦ 63
 ♣ KQ63
 ♠ 3
 ♥ AKQ863
 ♦ AQ8
 ♣ 1087
 ♠ 942
 ♥ 4
 ♦ J97542
 ♣ J92
 ♠ KQ1065
 ♥ J72
 ♦ K10
 ♣ A54

Dealer: South
 E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
2 ♥	3 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

 Opening Lead: ♥ A

4
 ♠ 984
 ♥ 76
 ♦ AQ62
 ♣ 9632
 ♠ AK6
 ♥ K3
 ♦ KJ104
 ♣ KJ107
 ♠ 52
 ♥ QJ9852
 ♦ 873
 ♣ AQ
 ♠ QJ1073
 ♥ A104
 ♦ 95
 ♣ 854

Dealer: West
 Both Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
2 NT	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

 Opening Lead: ♠ Q

5
 ♠ AKJ762
 ♥ 87
 ♦ Q8
 ♣ KJ6
 ♠ 108
 ♥ QJ53
 ♦ 42
 ♣ 107432
 ♠ 43
 ♥ AK642
 ♦ 976
 ♣ AQ5
 ♠ Q95
 ♥ 109
 ♦ AKJ1053
 ♣ 98

Dealer: North
 N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

 Opening Lead: ♥ A

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Successful Bridge Defense, Part 2 – Hand Analysis

1. Dealer opens 1S and responder, with 15 points, bids 2C. Opener rebids 2H and responder bids game in spades. LHO leads the HA and partner should signal with the H7, the start of an echo, showing a doubleton. LHO continues with the HK and should lead the NINE of hearts for partner to ruff. The 9 is a suit preference signal for the higher of the other side suits, diamonds. If RHO returns a diamond, the defenders set the hand. Without the D9 signal, it will look right to RHO to lead a club, dummy's weaker suit, and not a diamond. On any return but a diamond, declarer can pull two rounds of trumps, unblock the AKQ of Clubs, cross to the SK, and discard his one losing diamond on the thirteenth club to make four.
2. Dealer passes and second hand opens a heart. Third seat overcalls a spade. Advancer makes a cue bid of 2H, which shows a limit raise. Opener doubles for a heart lead. Overcaller bids 3D to show a full opening hand. The partnership may get to 4S or may stop at the three level since both partners' hands have wasted values in hearts. In either event defenders can set the hand. LHO leads the singleton H6 in partner's suit, and RHO should play K and A of hearts and then the H9, a suit preference signal for a diamond. If LHO returns a diamond to the opener, RHO can play a fourth heart and LHO will ruff with the S9 to give the defenders a trump promotion. Defenders take two hearts, two trumps and the DA, to set 3S. If RHO does not lead the fourth heart to manufacture a trump promotion, declarer can make three.
3. Dealer opens 1S and second seat has a nice hand, six good hearts and 15 points, so overcalls 2H. Responder has 10 hcp and four spades with partner, so bids 3H, a limit raise. Since opener has a minimum, he bids 3S which ends the auction. LHO leads the HA, followed by the HK, RHO showing out. LHO now knows the distribution of the heart suit is 6331, so she could lead a third cashing heart. However, LHO wants to get partner on lead to run a diamond through declarer, so LHO plays the EIGHT of hearts, forcing partner to ruff, instead of cashing the HQ. The 8 is a suit preference signal for the higher suit, diamonds. By getting partner on lead, LHO can score two diamond tricks to set the hand. Defenders take two hearts, two diamonds and a ruffing trick for down one. If LHO wins the third heart herself, defenders do not set the hand. Declarer can pull trump and discard one of the losing diamonds on dummy's fourth club to make 3S.
4. Dealer opens 1D. Responder bids 1H and opener jumps to 2NT to show a balanced hand with 18-19 points. Responder, with six hearts, bids 4H to end the auction. LHO leads the SQ and defenders see the SA and SK in the dummy, so there is no hope in the suit and RHO should give a suit preference signal at Trick 1. RHO, who has the AQ of Diamonds over dummy's KJ, should play the 9 of Spades, a signal for diamonds, the higher of the other non-trump suits. When LHO gets in with the Ace of Hearts, she should lead the D9, which RHO wins with the A or Q, depending on declarer's play from dummy. RHO should cash the remaining high honor and return a third diamond for partner to ruff. Absent the signal at Trick 1, LHO would not know whether to lead a club or a diamond, since dummy's cards are virtually the same in both suits.
5. This hand shows how defenders can use both attitude and suit preference signals on the same hand. Dealer opens 1S. Responder has a nice hand with great diamonds, worth far more than just ten high card points. Responder wants to make a limit raise with three trumps so starts by bidding 1NT forcing. When opener rebids his six card spade suit, responder bids game. The lead is the HA from A-K and partner should play the QUEEN, an attitude signal showing the Jack. LHO wants to get partner in so leads a heart to partner's Jack entry. LHO should play the TWO, suit preference for the lower remaining suit, clubs. When in with the HJ, RHO returns a club to LHO's A-Q to set the hand. If LHO does not get RHO in with the HJ, defenders will not score two clubs. Declarer can pull trumps and then pitch all his side suit losers away on long diamonds to take ten or eleven tricks.