

Defensive Carding

Lecture Notes

1. What Kind of Signal Is It?

You are East and this is your hand:

N Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A
 ♥ 7652
 ♦ Q7
 ♣ K109873

North passes. You consider a 3♣ preempt but there are too many negatives – too few clubs, a poor quality suit despite the fine interiors, a somewhat defensive hand, the unfavorable vulnerability, and the four-card major. Prudently, you pass. South opens 1NT, and this is the auction:

North	East	South	West
P	P	1NT	P
2♣	X	2♠	3♣
4♠	All Pass		

You have some hope for setting South's 4♠ contract. West probably has four trumps.

West leads the ♣5 and North tables the dummy. This is your defensive perspective with the dummy (North) on your right:

♠	7654
♥	AQ94
♦	A10863
♣	—

♠	A
♥	7652
♦	Q7
♣	K109873

Declarer ruffs with North's ♠4. What club card do you play? Why do you play that card?

Many partnerships insist that when the dummy is void there must be a suit preference signal. East's only honor in the red suits is the $\heartsuit Q$. Following that agreement to the letter, East would play the $\clubsuit 3$.

It is seldom best to woodenly follow an agreement which may or may not pay off on a particular hand. Before playing the $\clubsuit 3$ it is better if East does some thinking.

Rule of Eleven

After bidding $3\clubsuit$ West led the $\clubsuit 5$. The partnership's lead agreement is "fourth best":

LENGTH LEADS:

4th Best	vs SUITS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	vs NT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3rd/5th Best	vs SUITS <input type="checkbox"/>	vs NT <input type="checkbox"/>
	Attitude vs NT <input type="checkbox"/>	

Playing fourth best leads the Rule of Eleven applies:

Rule of 11 - Leads: **Bridge Play. Rule of 11** - Assuming fourth-best leads, subtracting the value of the opening lead from **11** determines the number of outstanding cards above the rank of the suit led.

Okay, here we go!

$11 - 5 = 6$ higher clubs in the North, East, and South hands.

North: 0

East: 5

South: 1

Who has the $\clubsuit A$? It must be South. If West has the $\clubsuit A$ then he would have led that card and not the $\clubsuit 5$. The Rule of Eleven tells us that South's only club higher than the $\clubsuit 5$ is the $\clubsuit A$. West's clubs must be headed by the $\clubsuit QJ65$. West may also have a fifth club – the $\clubsuit 4$ or the $\clubsuit 2$ – but if West has five clubs he may have reasonably chosen to bid $4\clubsuit$ rather than $3\clubsuit$. As things stand initially it appears that South's clubs are $\clubsuit A42$.

Count to 40

South has at 15-17 HCP, North 10 HCP, and East is looking at 9 HCP. That adds up to 34-36 HCP. West has 4-6 HCP, and he is known to have the $\clubsuit Q$ and $\clubsuit J$. That doesn't leave much

room for the ♦K. South is a pretty heavy favorite to have the ♦K. It seems fairly imprudent to tell West – and South, also – that East has the ♦Q by playing the suit preference ♣3 at trick 1.

The Enlightening Truth about Suit Preference Signals

In situations where the dummy is short in the suit led to trick 1 a suit preference signal is a really bad idea. Not only is it imprudent for East to tell declarer that he has the dodgy ♦Q, but it is equally imprudent to insist that West lead a diamond should he gain the lead at some point in the play.

What's more, the best signal, in almost all situations including ones where the dummy is short in the suit led to trick 1, is "Attitude." The convention card is marked thusly:

Primary signal to partner's leads

Attitude Count Suit preference

Let's assume that the partnership signaling agreement is "Standard":

DEFENSIVE CARDING

Standard: vs SUITS vs NT

Okay, then, which club should East play to the first trick, to show attitude towards clubs?

First, an Aside for the Die-Hard Suit Preference Advocates

Speaker: Yes, I see that you have your hand raised. What say you?

Participant: Didn't East already say that he has good clubs when he doubled the Stayman 2♣ bid? West got the message, after all! West bid 3♣ and his opening lead was the ♣5 from ♣QJ65. Declarer ruffed in the dummy. Why must East play a card which tells West whether he likes or dislikes clubs? Isn't it obvious that East likes clubs?

Speaker: Well, it's like I said, if East plays the ♣3 as a suit preference signal for diamonds he will disclose the location of the ♦Q to South and it will be a simple matter to finesse East for that card. Furthermore ...

Participant (interrupting): You said yourself that East may have as many as six HCP. What if East has the ♦K? East wants West to know that it is safe to lead a diamond, right?

What is gained by telling the same story twice? Obviously East likes clubs! Perhaps it doesn't work particularly well on this hand, but shouldn't East strive to impart new information with a suit preference signal?

Speaker: If West has the ♦K along with the ♠Q, that is all he has. How is he going to gain the lead in order to lead a diamond?

Participant: I just think that, in the long run, it is better for East to give a suit preference signal whenever dummy is void in the suit led at trick 1.

Speaker: What can East do if he has no preference? If East, more than anything else, would like West to not lead a red suit, in the off chance that West regains the lead? I would argue that, on this hand, and for most hands, it is sufficient, and best, for East to tell West either, "I want you to lead another club" or "I would like you to switch to another suit, but I am not saying which one." That is the essence of the attitude signal.

Participant: But ...

Speaker: Thank you for your insights. It is time to move on.

The Standard Attitude Signal

To indicate that he likes clubs – and to tell his partner that he would like to see another club led if West regains the lead – East must choose a card from ♠K109873 which says, "I like clubs, and I would like to see you lead clubs again."

Which club should East play?

For many players the thinking goes, "I can signal that I like clubs by playing any card that is not my lowest club." For those players the play would be the ♣7.

Before turning the first trick over, West says:

Wait a minute! I need to see all of the cards.

East sheepishly turns up the ♣7. South shows his ♣2. West thinks:

That ♣7 may very well be West's lowest club. Declarer may have been dealt the ♣A432. Surely, for his double of the Stayman 2♣ bid, West has a club higher than the ♣7!

It would be nice if East can witness his partner's struggles and hear the alarms going off and instantly regret his decision to table the mamby-pamby ♣7. Call it a "learning opportunity."

Simple rules for signaling a positive attitude

When playing an attitude signal that has the intention of saying "I like this suit and would like for you to lead it again if you can," there are some simple carding rules to follow.

- Play the highest card that you can afford
- If you play a card from a touching sequence of two or more cards, play the highest card in the sequence.
- The following rule applies when you are following suit to a trick that you cannot win (as in this case where the opening lead is ruffed in the dummy):
 - The King denies the Ace and promises the Queen, e.g., **K**QJ65
 - The Queen denies the King and promises the Jack. e.g., **Q**J1065
 - etc.

Following the above rules, from ♣K109873, East thinks:

- Knowing that West has the ♣QJ65, I can actually afford to play the ♣K.
- Still, I would rather play a card from my interior sequence. From ♣10987 the carding rule tells me that I should play the ♣10, which promises the ♣9. Not the ♣9, because the ♣9 would deny the ♣10. Not the ♣8, because that would deny the ♣9. Not the ♣7, because that would deny the ♣8.

Post-mortem: learning to signal

After the hand has been played, or when the round is over, or when the game is done, West is still reeling from the headache East gave him by playing the ♣7. West can't help but think, "For heaven's sake, how hard is it to signal with the ♣10?"

The sad fact is that any East player who produces the ♣7, thinking "That is a high club!" is probably doomed to repeat this poor signaling effort. In fact, *many players never signal at all!*

Learning how to signal is a stepwise process.

1. Recognize the need to signal.
2. What is my partnership's carding agreement?
3. How do I go about exercising the carding agreement?
4. Can my partner trust my signals?
5. Can I trust my partner's signals?

My recommendation is that if you have a situation where your partner's carding has confused you, ask your partner to circle the hand on his score sheet and make a point to discuss it after the game, while looking at the hand record.

Moving on

At trick 2 declarer led North's ♠6 to East's ♠A. West followed with the ♠8. An astute East knows that the ♠8 is West's lowest spade, and probably not the ♠J1098 because then West would have played the ♠J. West is therefore marked with the ♠Q or the ♠K. Already marked with the ♣QJ and at most 6 HCP, East knows that West certainly does not have the ♦K. East is relieved that he did not reveal the location of his ♦Q.

At trick 3 East leads another club. South plays the ♣4 and ruffs in the dummy. East knows that declarer started with the ♣A42. At trick 4 declarer leads dummy's last spade. South plays the ♠Q and West wins the ♠K. East knows now that West was dealt the ♠K1098 and the ♣QJ65. Declarer has all of the missing red suit honors.

After winning the ♠K West leads the ♣Q. Declarer wins the ♣A, cashes the ♠J, and runs the hearts until West ruffs with the master trump, the ♠10, making four.

The full hand:

N Deals	♠ 7654	9
E-W Vul	♥ AQ94	
	♦ A10863	
	♣ —	
♠ K1098		♠ A
♥ 103		♥ 7652
♦ 952		♦ Q7
♣ QJ65		♣ K109873
	♠ QJ32	
10	♥ KJ8	
6 9	♦ KJ4	
15	♣ A42	
NS 4N; NS 4♠; NS 4♥;		
NS 5♦; EW 2♣; Par +430		

Declarer played the hand well. East's defensive plan, to keep leading clubs, was the best defense, but it was not good enough to defeat the contract.

If the vulnerability had been switched, NS vulnerable, then East-West would have been able to sacrifice successfully at 5♣. If 5♣ is doubled and the contract is set 3 tricks the EW score of -500 is better than -620 defending 4♠.

2. When a Suit Preference Signal is Mandated

You are East and you pick up the following hand:

E Deals
Both Vul

♠ 875
♥ K
♦ 843
♣ K108532

This is the auction:

East	South	West	North
P	P	1♥	1♠
P	1NT	P	2♣
P	2♠	All Pass	

In your partnership third seat opening bids may be light with lead directing implications. An opening bid of 1 of a major may be on a good four-card suit. You note that South had a particularly difficult time with the auction.

You are going to lead the ♥K. Before you lead you figure that your partner should be able to figure out that you may have been dealt a singleton. If West has the ♥A and he allows you to win the first trick you expect your partner to play a card which indicates which suit he would like you to lead at trick 2 – a *suit preference signal*.

A suit preference signal is used when the defenders have a potential ruff:

- When you lead a singleton.
- When you lead a card in a suit where you your partner may have a singleton or a void.

You lead the ♥K and dummy (South) comes down. This is East's perspective:

♠ 875
♥ K
♦ 843
♣ K108532

♠ 3
 ♥ 1098532
 ♦ KJ65
 ♣ J6

It appears that South was hoping that North would rebid diamonds. Conditions did not improve much when North rebid 2♣. Should South have rebid 2♥? How would North have interpreted 2♥?

At trick 1 declarer calls for South's ♥2. West plays the ♥6 and North the ♥J.

Assessing the layout of the heart suit

The first step for East is to look at the first trick and assess the lie of the heart suit. East must determine that the three outstanding low hearts are ♥4, ♥6, and ♥7. West has played the ♥6. The ♥4 and ♥7 remain hidden. West has one of those low heart cards. Can North have the other?

If you are a die-hard five-card-majors-only sort you will surmise that West's hearts are ♥AQ764. Why, then, did West play the ambiguous ♥6? That doesn't make much sense.

If you are flexible you realize that the agreement on your partnership's Convention Card allows West to make a lead-directing third seat opening bid with a four-card major:

MAJOR OPENING

Expected Min. Length	4	5
1st/2nd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3rd/4th	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Furthermore, if you are observant then you understand your partner's personal tendencies. Is he more likely to open, in the third seat, 1♥ with ♥AQxx, or 1♦ with a suit of lesser quality? It is at times like these that it does not matter at all what your personal preference is on this issue. You, personally, may never open a four-card major. Your opinion on the matter of making lead-directing 1-of-a-major third-seat opening bids is moot – you did not open 1♥; your partner did.

Okay, then, if East assumes from West's play of the ♥6, which logically is not from ♥AQ754, that West has the ♥A and the ♥Q and that his four-card heart suit is either ♥AQ76 or ♥AQ64. Which one is it? It would have certainly been clearer if West had played either the ♥4 or the ♥7.

Let's think this through logically. If West has a club void it seems likely that, for his opening 1♥ bid, that West also has the ♦A. If West has the ♦A and the ♥AQ76 then West would have played the unambiguous ♥7, asking for a diamond switch. After all, asking East to lead a diamond at trick 2 makes more sense than asking East to compromise his clubs by leading into North's club suit.

On balance, the educated guess is that West was dealt ♥AQ64, and that by playing the ♥6 West has shown a preference for a switch to diamonds.

Moving on

At trick 2 West leads the ♦3. Declarer plays South's ♦4, West the ♦A, and North the ♦10. At trick 3 West cashes the ♥A, on which North contributes the ♥7. That tricky North, playing the ♥J at trick 1! West did indeed have a four-card heart suit!

At trick 4 West leads the ♣7. The bidding marks North with four clubs. West counts to 13: 6 (W) + 2 (S) + 4 (N) = 12. West's ♣7 must be a singleton. Declarer attempts the club finesse, losing to East's ♣K. At trick 5 East gives West a club ruff, the fifth and final defensive trick. For the score of -110 East-West earns 10 of a possible 16 matchpoints.

This is the layout:

E Deals	♠ AKQJ10		
Both Vul	♥ J7		10
	♦ Q10		
	♣ AQ94		
♠ 9642		♠ 875	
♥ AQ64		♥ K	
♦ A972		♦ 843	
♣ 7		♣ K108532	
	♠ 3		
19	♥ 1098532		
10 6	♦ KJ65		
5	♣ J6		
NS 3♠; NS 3♥; NS 2N;			
N 2♦; S 1♦; NS 1♣;			
Par +140			

North could have made 3♠ by rising with the ♣A and drawing trumps. Don't blame North, however. North can count West's high cards. North knows that if West has the ♣K then he has 13 HCP, rather than only 10 HCP.

3. The Auction – a Defender's Best Signal

You are West:

Dealer: S
Vul: None

♠AJT64
♥96
♦A4
♣Q752

South opens 1♠. With insufficient support for both red suits, you cannot double. Your hand is not good enough to overcall 1NT. You pass – a “trap pass.”

This is the auction:

South	West	North	East
1♠	P	P	1NT
2♥	2NT	3♥	All Pass

The final “pass” is painful. Even though it feels like your hand – the range for East’s 1NT bid is 11-15 HCP – there is no guarantee that you can set 3♥. Frustrating!

Opening Lead

Whatever you choose to lead, there is no guarantee of success. Suppose you hit on the lead of the ♦A because

- East may have the ♦K. East can win the second diamond trick then give you a diamond ruff.
- East may have the ♥A. If East captures the first trump trick then he can then give you a diamond ruff.

You lead the ♦A. North tables the dummy and this is West’s perspective:

♠3
♥J875
♦T9765
♣JT3

♠AJT64
♥96
♦A4
♣Q752

East plays the ♦2 and South the ♦3. At trick 2 you lead the ♦4. East plays the ♦J and South the ♦K.

At trick 3 declarer leads South's ♥K, ♥6, ♥5, ♥A. At trick 4 East leads the ♦8, ♦Q, ♥9, ♦5.

Count the tricks

The defenders have won 3 of the first four tricks: ♦A, ♥A, and a diamond ruff. You need two more tricks to defeat the contract.

Count the distribution

It seems that East has 5♠, 4♥, 3♦, and 1♣.

- Spades: For his balancing 1NT bid East must have two or more spades. South has five or more spades. East must have exactly two spades and South exactly five spades.
- Hearts: South has four or five hearts.
- Diamonds: South has three diamonds.
- Clubs: South has 0 or 1 club.

If declarer is void in clubs then East has ♣AK9864. While it is conceivable that East's distribution is 2-2-3-6 it seems more likely that, with those clubs, East would have balanced with a bid of 2♣ rather than 1NT.

It seems, therefore, that East has only five clubs and that South's distribution is 5♠, 4♥, 3♦, and 1♣. East's distribution is 2♠, 3♥, 3♦, and 5♣.

Go for the set

The simple view is to hope that East has the ♣A. You can cash the ♠A and lead a club to East's ♣A.

What if South has the ♣A?

The simple view is that East has the ♣A. Placing South with the ♣A introduces a more complicated wrinkle to the defense. If South has the ♣A can the contract be set?

Suppose you can lead a card which East can win. East's next move will be to lead one of his remaining two trumps. Declarer cannot run the diamonds because East can ruff the fourth round of diamonds.

Declarer may simply draw trumps, ending in the dummy, cash North's ♦109, and lead a spade. If South has the ♣A then declarer will take the following tricks:

- Four trump tricks (three plus a spade ruff)
- No spade tricks
- Three diamond tricks
- The ♣A

That's 8 tricks. But can you get to the East hand?

What does the bidding tell you about East's spades?

In addition to needing two spades for his balancing 1NT bid, East *promised a spade stopper*. You have the ♠A and ♠J. Who has the ♠K and ♠Q? Surely East would not bid 1NT with neither spade honor, would he? Would he bid 1NT with the doubleton ♠Qx? It is possible, but unlikely, because ♠Qx is not a full stopper. Surely East has the ♠K and, possibly, also the ♠Q.

Are you bold enough to underlead your ♠A?

Surely you should trust your partner's 1NT bid, right?

Okay, that's it. At trick 5 you cross your fingers and lead the ♠4. East produces the ♠K (Yay!) When East looks up and sees that South has followed with the ♠5 you can see a huge grin coming across East's face. If he could give you a Gold Star here and now he would stick one right onto your Convention Card sleeve.

After winning the ♠K East promptly leads the ♥3. Declarer can only win 8 tricks in all.

This is the full hand:

Board: 27 ♠3
 Dealer: S ♥J875
 Vul: None ♦T9765
 ♣JT3

♠AJT64	N	♠K2
♥96	W	♥A32
♦A4	E	♦J82
♣Q752	S	♣K9864

N	♠♥♦♣	♠Q9875	2
N	2	♥KQT4	11 HCP 11
S	2	♦KQ3	
E	3 2	♣A	16
W	3 2		

Post-Mortem

If you had followed your initial view, assume East has the ♣A, then cashed the ♠A and led a club, declarer would have won the balance of the tricks and made 3♥:

- Win the ♣A
- Cash South's ♥Q
- Ruff a spade (felling East's ♠K)
- Draw East's last trump with dummy's ♥J
- Cash North's ♦109
- Ruff a club
- Win South's ♠Q at trick 13

4. Third Hand Low

Defenders live by the mantra "Third Hand High."

The East hand:

E Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ K874
 ♥ 432
 ♦ J106
 ♣ 532

The auction:

East	South	West	North
P	1♦	P	1♠
P	2NT	P	3NT
All Pass			

Opening lead: ♠2

North tables the dummy. This is East's defensive perspective:

♠ QJ106
♥ 985
♦ Q98
♣ K107

♠ K874
♥ 432
♦ J106
♣ 532

Declarer plays North's ♠6. What should East play?

What are West's spades?

There are good reasons to believe that West's opening lead is simply fourth best from his longest and strongest suit. It seems that South rebid 2NT with a singleton spade.

East figures that West must have the ♠A. If not then a suit headed by the ♠9 is not much of a suit, is it?

South must have the singleton ♠9, right? If South's singleton spade is anything lower then surely declarer would have played one of North's honors, and not the ♠6.

East does the math. If South has 19 HCP then West has 9 HCP. West is certainly not broke. If West has the ♠A and East chooses to not win the ♠K at trick 1 then it is most likely that declarer cannot win all of the tricks. There should be another chance to win the ♠K later in the play of the hand.

What if South does have the singleton ♠A? If that is the case and East plays the ♠K – *curtains!*

East finally decides, “I don’t think that there is any hurry to play the ♠K. *Patience, grasshopper!* I can play low here and let declarer win the first trick. If declarer wins the ♠9 maybe partner will figure out what I know – that South rebid 2NT with a singleton spade.”

East makes his final decision and follows suit with the ♠4. South plays the ♠A. *Phew!*

This is the hand:

E Deals	♠ QJ106	6
E-W Vul	♥ 985	
	♦ Q98	
	♣ K107	
♠ 9532		♠ K874
♥ J106		♥ 432
♦ A42		♦ J106
♣ A98		♣ 532
	♠ A	
8	♥ AKQ7	
9 4	♦ K753	
19	♣ QJ64	
NS 5♥; NS 4N; NS 4♠; NS 5♣; NS 4♦; Par +450		

Post-mortem

Which spade should West have led? We consult the convention card for the standard treatment:

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X X X X
X X X X X

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Hmm. Should West have led the ♠9?

Give North’s 1♠ response it seems imprudent for West to lead that card. The ♠9 rates to be an important spot card that needs to be played later to cover a lower card.

The convention card doesn’t specify how low that first “x” from “xxxx” should be. The 8? The 7?

There are differences of opinion, to be sure. Some players like to lead a high spot card to deny an honor. To be sure, on this hand the ♠9 lead would have made East’s play at trick 1 more clear.

My personal preference is to lead low from three or more cards. This is called the “count lead.” I would lead the ♠2 and expect my partner to play low at trick 1, inferring that there is no hurry to play the ♠K.

I like to save my 9 leads for times when the suit is headed by 987 or 986. If, as on this hand, I lead the 9 and partner has the 8, I want my partner to think, “I am looking at the 8 so partner’s lead of the 9 indicates shortness. Rather than leading his best suit my partner is trying to lead what he thinks is my best suit.”

Whatever you and your partner decide to lead from four small, ***be sure that you are on the same page.***

5. When Does a Defender’s Signal Show Count?

The East hand:

E Deals
None Vul

♠ 765
 ♥ KQ96
 ♦ AKJ105
 ♣ 2

East	South	West	North
1♦	1♠	X	2♣
2♥	2♦	P	3♣
3♦	3♠	4♦	5♣
All Pass			

In this remarkable auction North makes the final bid – and nobody doubles!

East leads the ♦A (Ace from AK). South tables the dummy. This is East’s defensive perspective:

♠ 765
 ♥ KQ96
 ♦ AKJ105
 ♣ 2

♠ AQ109842
 ♥ A75
 ♦ Q84
 ♣ —

South plays the ♦4, West the ♦9, and North the ♦6.

Which card should East lead at trick 2?

The partnership carding agreement

The partnership's convention card states the carding agreement:

DEFENSIVE CARDING
 vs SUITS vs NT
 Standard:
 Except

Why did West play the ♦9? Does West want East to continue the suit? If East continues with the ♦K can he the lead a third diamond for West to ruff?

East thinks about the partnership's "Primary signal" agreement:

Primary signal to partner's leads
 Attitude Count Suit preference

If the primary signal is "Attitude" then West must be telling East, "I want you to continue diamonds." That's got to be what West ♦9 is trying to tell East, right?

East figures, "Okay, *I must obey*." At trick 2 East leads the ♦K. Declarer ruffs! Declarer leads ♣A, ♣Q, lowing to West's ♣K. West leads a heart, but it is too late. Declarer discards a heart on dummy's ♦Q. *Making five!*

East's winning defense was to lead the ♥K at trick 2. The ♥Q would have been the setting trick.

Post-mortem

East feels that West fooled him at trick 1. He feels betrayed. East asks, "Why did you play the ♦9?"

West's answer:

The auction indicated how you should have defended. My negative doubled promised four or more hearts. Later, over 3♠, I competed by bidding 4♦. If I have five hearts I will bid 4♥. Instead, I bid 4♦. I must have three or more diamonds.

If you figure that I must have 3 or more diamonds for my 4♦ bid then my ♦9 is a count signal which shows an even number of diamonds. I was trying to tell you that I was dealt four diamonds and that you should not attempt to cash the ♦K because declarer will ruff and that will promote dummy's ♦Q into a winner.

When dummy has the Queen

West was certainly right to play the ♦9 – the card which makes it clear that he was dealt an even number of diamonds. Looking at dummy's ♦Q West knows that East needs to know how many diamonds West has in order to be able to determine if he can successfully cash the ♦K.

On this hand the additional information from West's 4♦ bid should have clarified West's count message – not two diamonds, but four diamonds.

Even without the additional information provided by the auction West should always show count when East leads and Ace and dummy has the Queen. The count signal, even if East gets it wrong and thinks that West has two and not four cards in the led suit, is the only way for East to tell West whether the King can be cashed.

The full hand:

E Deals	♠ J		
None Vul	♥ 42		
	♦ 6		14
	♣ AQJ1098743		
♠ K3		♠ 765	
♥ J1083		♥ KQ96	
♦ 9732		♦ AKJ105	
♣ K65		♣ 2	
	♠ AQ109842		
8	♥ A75		
7 13	♦ Q84		
12	♣ —		
NS 4♣; EW 2♥; EW 2♦;			
NS 1♠; Par +130			

Defensive Carding Practice Hands

1. Signaling Count when Dummy has the Queen

N Deals	♠ A4				
Both Vul	♥ A986		13		
	♦ QJ5				
	♣ AK73				
♠ K2		♠ J73			
♥ Q32		♥ 1054			
♦ AK102		♦ 8643			
♣ J852		♣ 1064			
	♠ Q109865				
18	♥ KJ7				
13 1	♦ 97				
8	♣ Q9				
NS 4N; NS 4♠; NS 4♥;					
NS 3♦; NS 3♣; Par +630					

North	South
1♣	1♠
2NT	4♠
Pass	

Opening lead: ♦A

East followed suit with the ♦3 and South made the fine play of the ♦9.

West was flummoxed.

I hope that East knows, looking at dummy's ♦QJ5, that his play of his lowest diamond signals count, that he was dealt an odd number of diamonds. If East has three diamonds then I can afford to cash the ♦K now. However, declarer's ♦9 looks suspiciously like a singleton.

Maybe I can shift to another suit and figure out later what to do with the ♦K.

At trick 2 West led the ♣2. Declarer won the ♣Q (West's played the ♣10). Even this trick had West wondering what was going on.

Allegedly, East's play of the ♣10 denies the ♣9. If East has the ♣109 then he should play the ♣9 – Third Hand High Enough. If East has the ♣109 does he know that the ♣10 is a false card which fools me into thinking that declarer has the ♣9.

As it so happens East did not have the ♣9 and the ♣10 was the correct third hand high play.

Declarer played ♠A then ♠4 to South's ♠10. In with the ♠K, it was West's last chance to cash the ♦K. West, however, stuck to his original interpretation that East was dealt five diamonds. West led a low club, hoping that either East was false-carding when he played the ♣10 or that South, with the ♣9, would not have the nerve to finesse.

West was relieved when declarer won dummy's ♣A and followed suit with South's ♣9. But then the roof caved in. Declarer cashed dummy's ♣K and discarded the ♦7. West's stomach sank when he saw this happen. What's worse, declarer then played heart to South's ♥K, ran the spades, and squeezed West in three suits.

Making 5, for NS +650.

Declarer misplayed the hand. After averting the cashing ♦K South could have immediately won three club tricks, discarding the ♦7, before conceding the ♠K. The subsequent squeeze would have netted 11 tricks.

Instead, declarer gave West a second chance to cash the ♦K.

The only sure way for the defenders to hold declarer to 10 tricks is for West to cash the ♦K at trick 2. For West to know that cashing the ♦K is safe East must play the ♦8 at trick 1, *signaling an even number of diamonds*.

2. South's Count Signal

W Deals	♠ A1084	20
Both Vul	♥ 3	
	♦ K865	
	♣ Q1054	
♠ J6		♠ K975
♥ KJ86542		♥ Q109
♦ —		♦ A97
♣ A862		♣ K73
	♠ Q32	
9	♥ A7	
9 12	♦ QJ10432	
10	♣ J9	
EW 4♥; NS 3♦; EW 2♣;		
Par -500; NS 5♦ x-2		

North's aggressive overcall inspired South to bid a successful sacrifice. It got even better when the opponents took the push to an unmakeable contract.

West	North	East	South
3♥	X	4♥	5♦
5♥	P	P	X
All Pass			

Opening lead: ♦5

Declarer won East's ♦A and discarded the ♠6. At trick 2 he led West's ♠J. Immediately, both defenders chimed in with "No, the lead is in the East hand. Hoping that declarer would lead a low spade from the dummy, South was ready to pounce with the ♠K. Instead, declarer called for a low club. South *followed suit with the ♣J*.

After winning the ♣K declarer led the ♠J. North, apparently hoping that declarer would finesse against the Queen, played low. Declarer rose with East's ♠K, and lost only two tricks – the ♥A and the ♣Q.

Perhaps North got caught up in the play of the spade suit, focusing solely on the hope that declarer would float the ♠J. Instead, before playing to the spade trick, North should count declarer's distribution.

With ♣Jxx of clubs South would have played low. With ♣Jxxx South would have signaled count by playing a high card, *but not the ♣J because that would signal possession of the ♣10*.

South's play of the ♣J signals either a doubleton or a singleton. North can see that declarer's distribution is either 2-7-0-4 or 2-6-0-5. Knowing this, North thinks

If I win the ♠A then declarer has only one club discard on East's ♠K. I will win a club trick later, and I must hope that partner can provide a defensive trump winner. Partner doubled 5♥ so that is not too much to hope for.

3. You can lead a horse to water ...

S Deals	♠ AK	15
N-S Vul	♥ 9876	
	♦ A92	
	♣ Q982	
♠ Q942		♠ 76
♥ K		♥ AQJ543
♦ J104		♦ K865
♣ K10543		♣ 6
	♠ J10853	
13	♥ 102	
9 10	♦ Q73	
8	♣ AJ7	
EW 2♥; EW 2♦; NS 1♠; NS 1♣; Par -110		

South	West	North	East
P	P	1♣	2♥
2♠	All Pass		

South's undervalued 2♠ bid lacked discipline. Would the defenders find the proper defense for the set?

West led the ♥K. East followed with the ♥3.

West thought

I have no doubt that my partner knows that I was dealt one or two hearts. East may even surmise that if I have ♥Kx then I might have competed with a 3♥ bid. East must think that it is more likely I was dealt the singleton ♥K.

There must be a very good reason for East to have played the ♥3 – a clear suit preference signal which asks me to shift to a club.

At trick 2 West led the ♣5. West figured that East would win the ♣A and that he may even have a second club. If East has a second club then he doesn't want East to continue with a second club. West's highest spot card – the ♣5 – is West's attempt to steer East towards cashing the ♥A.

West followed with the ♣6.

North-South +140

If East is thinking suit preference then he will follow suit with the ♥5, a higher spot card which requests a diamond shift.

The best defense is for East to overtake the ♥K with the ♥A. East then cashes the ♥Q and then leads the ♥5, suit preference for diamonds. West ruffs and exits with the ♦J, scoring East's ♦K and later the ♣K and the ♠Q for a 1-trick set.

4. ... but you can't make him drink

N Deals	♠ Q		
N-S Vul	♥ AJ107		5
	♦ Q654		
	♣ Q654		
♠ KJ10765		♠ 32	
♥ 83		♥ K9542	
♦ 98		♦ J102	
♣ 1093		♣ KJ2	
	♠ A984		
11	♥ Q6		
4 8	♦ AK73		
17	♣ A87		
NS 3N; NS 5♦; NS 3♥; NS 4♣; EW 1♠; Par +600			

North	East	South	West
1♦	P	2♦	2♠
P	P	3NT	All Pass

Opening lead: ♣10

West's "inverted minor raise" 2♦ bid was forcing, promising at least 4 diamonds and 10 HCP.

With only 4 HCP any bid by West other than "Pass" certainly has its risks. West figured that the favorable vulnerability and the North-South diamond fit would bail him out at the 2 level, so he bid 2♠ to direct a spade lead.

When East failed to raise to 3♠ West decided to not risk leading a spade against South's 3NT contract, thinking that declarer might have both the ♠A and the ♠Q. West "knew" that East would feed West with spade leads whenever he gained the lead.

Declarer covered the ♣10 with North's ♣J. East played the ♣K and declarer ducked. At trick 2 East played the ♣J and declarer ducked again. East plowed on with a third club. Declarer won the ♣A, took the losing heart finesse and claimed 10 tricks.

North-South +630

For the defenders to hold declarer to 9 tricks East needs to view West's 2♠ bid as a lead directing bid. At trick 2 East should have led the ♠3.