

# Attitude Signals on Defense

January 22, 2025



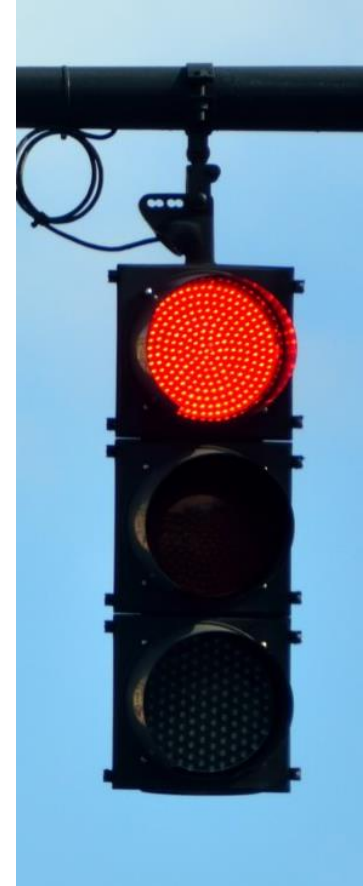
Partner, please  
**CONTINUE THAT  
SUIT**

Play a  
*“high spot”* card

Play a  
*“low spot”* card

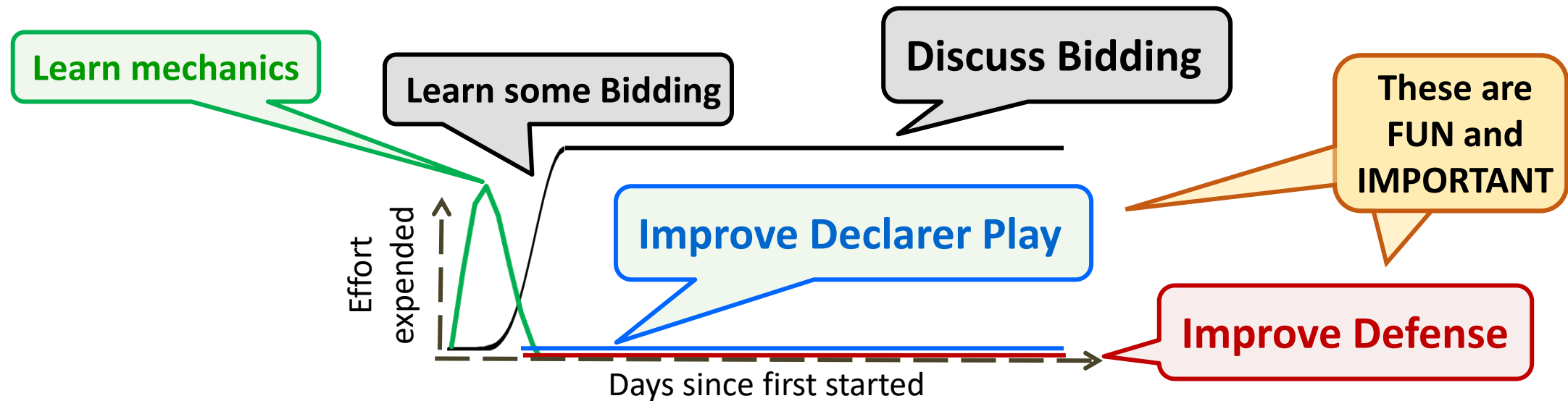
Partner, that suit  
seems **BAD**, to me

A “spot card” is a 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9



# Card Play (Declarer and Defense) are IMPORTANT & FUN

People are usually taught bridge like this:



# Attitude Signals on Defense

On defense, the only (legal) way to communicate with partner is  
**via the cards you play ... called “Signaling”**

Develop the **habit of Signaling** NOW  
... it will be **VITAL** to becoming a great defender

*This presentation assumes STANDARD signaling*



*... NOT “upside down” signaling*



# Defense is the hardest thing in bridge ...

Everyone is “blind” when bidding ... so nobody has an advantage

BUT ... once the bidding is finished ... Declarer can see her hand AND Dummy

... **and** can coordinate the play of those hands

... **and** usually has most of the HCP

... **and** she chose the Trump suit (or NT)

- These are **HUGE** advantages

On Defense, **you can see only your own cards** (and Dummy, after opening lead)

... so you'd like to coordinate with Partner on Defense

... **but HOW ???**

Your only (legal) method of communication is  
via the cards you play ... called “**Signaling**”

# Opening Leads vs a SUIT contract

## vs. Suit Contracts

**1. What suit?**

**2. Which card?**

**Lead**

**Examples**

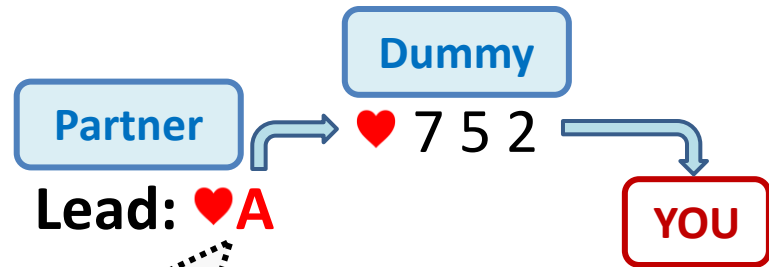
<p>Lead <b>singleton</b> (hoping to get a ruff)</p>	<div style="border: 2px solid orange; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>Everybody's favorite lead vs. a Suit contract 😊</p> </div>						
<p>Lead <b>partner's suit</b>    In <b>partner's suit</b></p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;">Top of doubleton</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Q3, 93</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Top of touching honors</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>QJ3, J103, KQJ43, AK93</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Else, low</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Q<b>63</b></td> </tr> </table>	Top of doubleton	<b>Q3, 93</b>	Top of touching honors	<b>QJ3, J103, KQJ43, AK93</b>	Else, low	Q <b>63</b>
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Else, low	Q <b>63</b>						
<p>Lead <b>your suit</b>    In <b>your suit</b></p> <div style="border: 2px solid orange; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><b>Do NOT lead a suit in which you have the A but NOT the K.</b> ( Leading A from AK is <b>GREAT.</b> )</p> </div>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;">Top of <b>2+</b> touching honors</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>KQ54, J1053, AK732</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Else, <b>4<sup>th</sup> highest</b> of longest, strongest</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>3</b> from K84<b>32</b>, <b>2</b> from Q9<b>72</b></td> </tr> </table>	Top of <b>2+</b> touching honors	<b>KQ54, J1053, AK732</b>	Else, <b>4<sup>th</sup> highest</b> of longest, strongest	<b>3</b> from K84 <b>32</b> , <b>2</b> from Q9 <b>72</b>		
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TODAY:

How to signal when Partner leads Top of a Sequence vs. a SUIT contract

# Motivation for Signaling on Defense

Partner is on lead vs. a ♠ contract  
 Let's look only at the ♥ suit:



Partner's Ace promises the King

After the A wins, how does Partner know whether to play the K ???

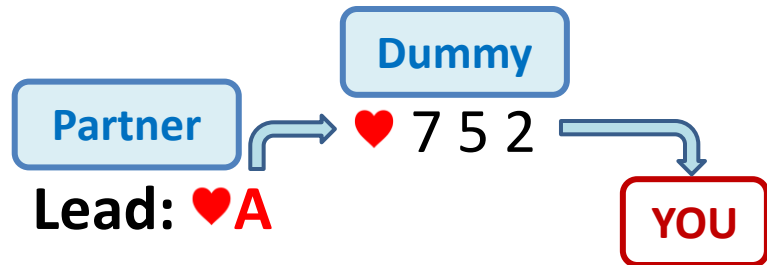
<b>Case 1:</b>	Dummy ♥ 7 5 2	YOU ♥ Q 8 3	<b>YES !!</b> Let's take the first 3 tricks !!
Partner ♥ A K J 6	Declarer ♥ 10 9 4	YOU play the 8	<b>HIGH SPOT →</b> Encourages continuation
<b>Case 2:</b>	Dummy ♥ 7 5 2	YOU ♥ 10 8 3	<b>NO !!!</b> It will set up Declarer's Q – if you wait, she'll never win the Q
Partner ♥ A K J 6	Declarer ♥ Q 9 4	YOU play the 3	<b>LOW SPOT →</b> DIScourages continuation



# Build the habit of SIGNALLING

## Repeating that example:

- Defending a ♠ contract
- Partner leads ♥A



- Your signal is **INFORMATION**, not a command
- If Partner has A K Q, she'll continue, despite your signal
- But if she has only A K, **she needs your help** to know whether to play K or change suit

### Case 1:

YOU  
♥ Q 8 3

You know Partner has the ♥K

- You think “we should continue ♥s”
- So TELL PARTNER “I like this suit”

Play the 8

A “high spot card” encourages continuation



### Case 2:

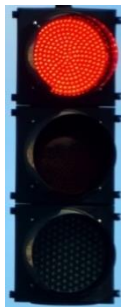
YOU  
♥ 10 8 3

You know Partner has the ♥K

- You think “I dunno about ♥s”
- So TELL PARTNER !!

Play the 3

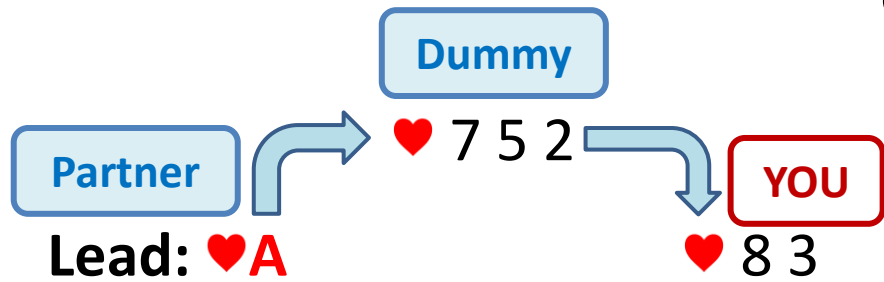
A “low spot card” DIScourages continuation



You **MUST MUST MUST** build the habit of signaling

# Another important habit – play “high-low” with doubleton

- Defending a ♠ contract
- Partner leads ♥A



YES !!

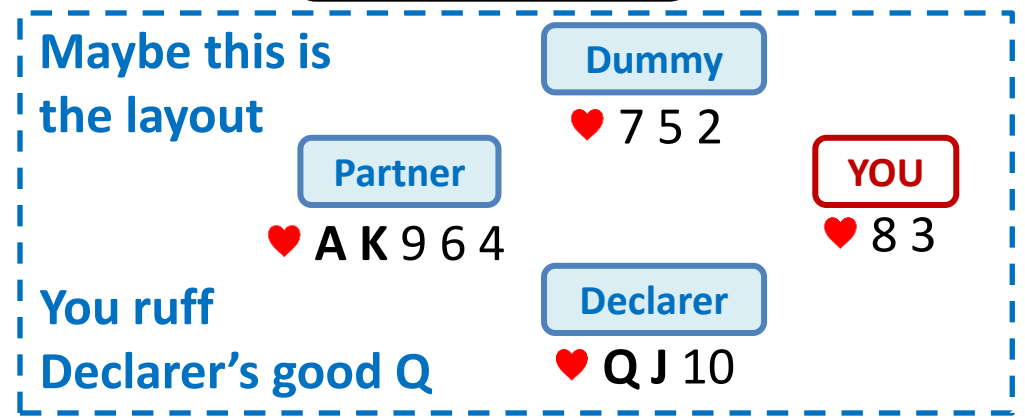
You can see the future!  
 Partner will win her K, then lead another, and you'll RUFF

Do you want Partner to continue the suit?

Play the 8 (encouraging)

When holding 2 cards, **play the higher, then the lower (called a “high-low”)**

When **you play the 8**, it is “**encouraging**” – Partner *doesn't know if you are showing the Q or starting a high-low* ... but she'll continue in either case! **Here, she'll play the K, and another ♥**, which you'll ruff.





# SUMMARY of Attitude Signals on Opening Lead

## When partner leads an Honor:

- Play a “**high spot**” to **encourage** continuing the suit
- Play a “**low spot**” to **discourage** A “spot card” is a 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
- Play “**high – low**” when you have **exactly 2 cards** in the suit

## Incorporating this into your game:

1. **Signal EVERY TIME** *(build the habit !!)*
2. **Start watching** for partner’s signals
3. **Eventually**, you & partner will see the signals ... and act on them !!

### Exception:

**Intermediate**

If partner leads the A (promising the K) and you have **Qx Doubleton**, most people agree to play the x

# WHY must you **build the habit of signaling EVERY TIME** ?

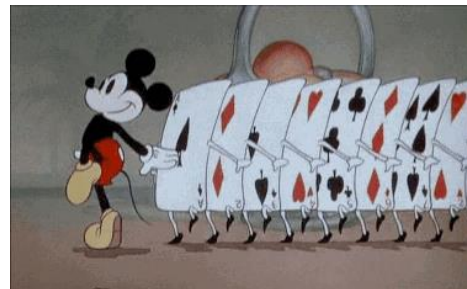
If you don't signal **EVERY TIME**, **Partner will never learn to look for your signals**

**... and vice-versa**

1. **Signal EVERY TIME** (*build the habit*)
2. **Start watching for partner's signals**
3. **Eventually, you'll see the signals ... and act on them !!**

This evolution takes a while

- But it's SO GREAT once you get used to it
- Cooperating on defense may be the most fun and amazing thing in Bridge



# Signals are not limited to when Partner leads an Ace

- Opponents' contract: 4 ♥
- Partner leads ♦K  
(which promises the ♦Q)
- Declarer plays ♦A from Dummy

Dummy	
♠	x x
♥	A x x x
♦	A 10 x
♣	Q x x x

YOU	
♠	x x
♥	x x x
♦	J 8 3
♣	x x x x x

- Which card do you play?

Play the ♦8 to ENCOURAGE

- Your ♦J means it's safe ( and attacking! ) to continue ♦ later in the hand
- So ... let Partner know you think she should continue !!!

# Examples – YOU are signaling

- Opponents' contract: 4 ♠

<p>Partner</p> <p>Lead: ♥A</p> <p>YOU</p> <p>♥ 8 3</p> <p>ENCourage</p>	<p>Partner</p> <p>Lead: ♥A</p> <p>YOU</p> <p>♥ 8 4 3</p> <p>DIScourage</p>	<p>Partner</p> <p>Lead: ♥A</p> <p>YOU</p> <p>♥ Q 8 3</p> <p>ENCourage</p>
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# Examples – Reading PARTNER’s signal

- Opponents’ contract: 4 ♠

YOU Partner  
♥ K Q 6 3 ♥ 8

Lead CONTINUE ♥

YOU Partner  
♥ A K 6 3 ♥ 2

Lead NOT PLAY ♥

YOU Partner  
♥ Q J 8 7 6 ♥ 5

Lead CONTINUE ??

YOU Partner  
♥ A K Q 3 ♥ 2

Lead CONTINUE ♥

*Partner’s signal is NOT a COMMAND.*  
*It’s INFORMATION based on what she knows.*  
*If you know more, ACT !!*

# PUNCH LINE ... Signal “attitude” when Partner leads an Honor!

Defense is a TEAM EFFORT

→ Try to help partner!

USUAL AGREEMENT about “attitude” signals:

- A **high “spot card” ENCOURAGES** continuation of the suit
- A **low “spot card” DISCOURAGES**

A “spot card” is a  
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

When you have a Doubleton, play “*high-low*”  
to tell partner you have **exactly 2**

*Partner can usually discern “high” vs “low”  
by looking at the cards in her hand and Dummy  
... sometimes a 5 (for example) is high, sometimes low  
... if partner can see the 4 3 2, then the 5 is clearly “low”  
... if she sees the 9 7 6 (but no 4 3 2), then the 5 is probably “high”*

# Sometimes Partner must look closely to see your signal

- Opponents' contract: 4♥
- Partner leads ♦A (which promises the ♦K)

Dummy

♠	x x
♥	A x x x
♦	Q 7 6
♣	K Q x x

YOU

♠	x x x x
♥	x x x
♦	5 2
♣	x x x x

**REMINDER:** when you have a Doubleton, play "high-low"

- Which card do you play? (the ♦5 or ♦2?)

You can see the future!!!

- ♦A ... ♦K ... another ♦, which you ruff!!!
- So LET PARTNER KNOW you want ♦ continued!!

E.g., if Partner has ♦ A K 10 9 8 ... the 5 is clearly "high"

**Play the ♦5 to ENCOURAGE**

- Hopefully, Partner figures out that the 5 is "high"
- Partner will cash the ♦K, (you play the ♦2, finishing a "high-low")
- Partner will lead another ♦, which you ruff!

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## Incorporating this into your game:

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### Exception:

**Intermediate**

If partner leads the A (promising the K) and you have **Qx Doubleton**, most people agree to play the x



# Your discards can (should) show attitude !!

- Declarer (South) is calling trump (Spades) – and you have run out
- On the trick below, you have no Spades – you **REALLY** want partner to lead a ♥ – so discard the ♥7



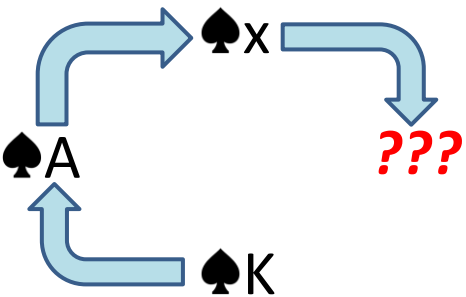
Discarding the ♥7 (a “high spot”) says “lead a ♥”

Dummy

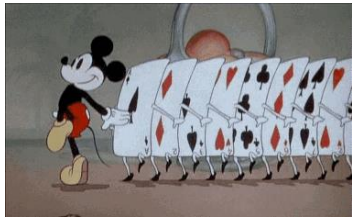
♠	x
♥	K J x
♦	K J x
♣	x

You

♠	
♥	AQ 7 2
♦	7 5 2
♣	x x



Signaling like this is EASY, and can REALLY HELP your team’s defense



A low spot says “I have no interest in this suit”

So you could throw the ♦2 to send the same message

## Help Partner by signaling Attitude in these situations

1. When **discarding on a suit Declarer is playing** (e.g., she's calling trump, and you've run out)

EXAMPLE on  
prior page

- Discard a **high “spot card”** in a suit you **want partner to lead**
- Discard a **low “spot card”** in a suit you **“don't like”**

2. **Partner starts a new suit** in the middle of the hand by playing an honor

Just like when partner makes an opening lead:

- A **high “spot card” ENCOURAGES** continuation of the suit
- A **low “spot card” DISCOURAGES**

# The 10% to remember – Attitude Signaling on Defense

- Signal ATTITUDE on Partner's opening Honor Card lead
  - ✓ High card encourages, low card discourages
- Signal ATTITUDE when Partner leads and Honor to start a new suit in the middle of the hand
  - ✓ High card encourages, low card discourages
- Signal ATTITUDE when you DISCARD in the middle of the hand
  - ✓ High card encourages, low card discourages

1. Signal EVERY TIME (*build the habit*)
2. Start watching for partner's signals
3. Eventually, you'll see the signals ... and act on them !!

PS – later, you can add “count” signals and “suit preference” signals

# Here's a cool one !!!

- South opens 1♠
- Opponents' contract: 4♠
- You lead ♥A
- Partner plays the ♥8

Dummy

♠ K x x x  
♥ x x  
♦ x x  
♣ A K Q J 10

You

♠ x x  
♥ A K 9  
♦ A Q 9 3 2  
♣ x x x

♥8

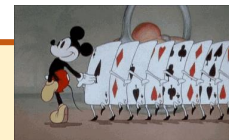
What's going on ??

Can't be a doubleton; if so, declarer has 6 ♥s

- Partner is saying "I have the ♥Q"
- When Declarer gets in, she'll call trump and **throw any ♦ losers on the fabulous Club suit**
- Your only hope is to get 2 tricks in ♥ and 2 tricks in ♦ ... **RIGHT NOW**
- Declarer clearly has the ♦K for her opening bid, so if you start ♦, you will set up her ♦K
- The only way to get those ♦ tricks is to **have Partner lead through declarer toward your ♦ A Q**

So ... **lead a small ♥ to partner's ♥Q**

- Looking at Dummy, Partner will realize "I must switch to ♦"
- **When she does, you take 2 ♦ tricks (plus the 2 ♥s) – Down 1 !!**



Defense is HARD, but FUN, and when you do something like this – **WOW !!!**