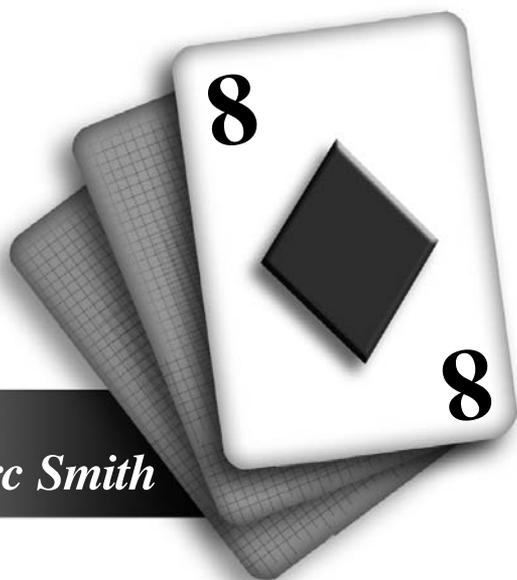


BRIDGE TECHNIQUE SERIES

DEFENSIVE SIGNALING



David Bird • Marc Smith

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Introduction

Defending is hard, very hard. Many players are good bidders and even more are superb dummy players. Few are exceptional defenders. Anyone who defends even moderately will be a regular winner.

There are three main reasons why defending is so much tougher than declaring. For a start, declarer usually holds the majority of the high cards and, in a suit contract, most of the trumps. He will therefore be on lead most of the time. He can switch tacks as it suits him. Your chances to influence the outcome of the hand as defenders will be far fewer. You will seldom have time to test the water — you or your partner will often have to find the best switch or continuation on your first attempt. It is therefore imperative that you both signal accurately so that the defender who must make the critical decision will be in possession of sufficient information.

Secondly, declarer can see his side's strengths and weaknesses. As a defender, you can see only half of yours. For example, we learn in an early lesson on declarer play to 'lead towards your strength'. As a defender, you will often not even know where that strength lies. Accurate defensive signals can provide this information.

Declarer's final advantage is that he controls both his hand and the dummy. As each of the defenders manages only half of their side's assets, they must work in tandem. It is no good, for example, if one defender is playing to force declarer while the other is trying to set up a defensive ruff — you must work as a partnership. Defensive signals are the tools that enable you to achieve this goal.

You will frequently hear players make comments along the lines of, 'I didn't signal because I didn't want to give information to declarer.' It is true that there are some situations in which a signal will

be of more help to declarer than it is to your partner. A good rule to follow is this: *If the information might help your partner to find the best defense later in the hand, you should signal accurately.*

Having established that you want to signal accurately, let's start to look at how you can signal. There are two main methods — attitude signals and count signals. To some extent, they are rival methods and you must choose between them.

The attitude signal

An attitude signal indicates whether you would like partner to continue the suit he has just led. A high spot card says that you like the suit and wish him to continue it. A low spot card denies such interest.

The count signal

A count signal gives no indication as to whether you like the suit that has been led. It merely states whether you have an even or odd number of cards in that suit. A high spot card indicates an even number of cards. A low spot card shows an odd number.

Which method is better?

It has long been generally agreed that it is best to use count signals when declarer plays a suit. He has chosen to play on this suit and it is unlikely that partner wants to know your strength there. Giving count in the played suit, however, will help partner to build up a complete count of the hand, greatly assisting his overall defense.

A decade or so ago, most players favored attitude signals when the defenders led a new suit. Things have changed! Play in a big tournament nowadays and you will find that many contestants use count signals throughout — both in declarer's suits and their own.

In this book we will start by looking closely at both attitude and count signals. We will note the situations where a particular method works well and those where it does not. In Chapter 3 we will see how you can combine the use of attitude signals and count signals, thereby getting the best of both worlds.

Hold on tight and enjoy the ride!

Attitude Signals

It matters little whether one starts to play bridge by attending classes, by reading books or simply by playing with friends, the first defensive signal learned by most players is the basic attitude signal. Using this method, you play a high spot card to tell partner that you like the suit he has led and a low one to tell him that you don't. This method is easy to teach, easy to learn, and easy to understand.

Look at this deal from the West position:

Both Vul. Dealer South	♠ K Q 4 ♥ 8 6 3 ♦ K 5 ♣ J 7 6 3 2	
♠ 7 6 3 ♥ Q J 10 5 ♦ Q J 8 2 ♣ K 8		♠ 10 8 2 ♥ K 9 2 ♦ 10 7 6 4 3 ♣ 9 5
	♠ A J 9 5 ♥ A 7 4 ♦ A 9 ♣ A Q 10 4	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3♣	pass	1♣
all pass			5♣

South gives you a chance, by bidding the club game instead of 3NT, and you lead the queen of hearts. Declarer wins with the ace, crosses to dummy with the king of spades, and plays a club to the queen and your king. How do you continue?