

DEFENSIVE TOOLS & SOURCES OF INFORMATION

by Maritha Pottenger

Defenders have 5 major sources of information in a bridge hand:

- 1) **Inferences from the bidding** and from the **line of play** selected by Declarer
- 2) **Counting points** (in Dummy, in hand and inferred points in Declarer's hand)
- 3) **Counting Distribution** (in all the hands)
- 4) **Counting Tricks** (be aware, at all times, whether Declarer has enough tricks for contract and whether Defenders have enough tricks to set contract. Also notice likely sources of Declarer's tricks).
- 5) **Defensive Signals**

Counting tricks helps you decide whether to be active (go aggressively after tricks for your side) or passive (don't break new suits; make Declarer do all his/her own work) when defending. You will be able to identify times when you must immediately **cash out** (take all the winners you or your partner has right now!)

The general hierarchy in **signaling** is **attitude** first; **count** second (when Declarer attacks a suit from his hand or Dummy) and **suit preference** in special situations—as long as attitude and count do not apply. By signaling with a partner, you can direct the line of defense and cooperate with each other. Signals help you count distribution, count high cards, and create lines of communication with each other.

At trick one, the usual signal is **attitude**. An encouraging signal tells partner that line of defense is good and suggests a continuation. (Sometimes an encouraging signal merely means partner cannot stand a shift!) A discouraging signal suggests (strongly!) that partner try something else. Depending on Dummy, that might be to switch to a weaker suit. It might be to take measures to kill dummy's long suit. It might be leading a trump to cut down on ruffs in Dummy. Partner is expected to use common sense and figure out what the logical shift is.

When defenders are **discarding**, the **first discard** is usually an **attitude** discard ("I like this suit" or "I don't like this suit.") The **second discard** is usually **count—present count**. Present count means indicating the number of cards you have left in the suit at the moment you make a discard. So, if you started with 4 cards and discarded a low one first ("I don't like it" as attitude), your 2nd discard in that suit would be your lowest remaining card (low from odd number; high from even number of cards).

Classic **suit preference** applies when you are playing a card for partner to ruff. The size of your spot card tells partner where your entry (or possible entry) is: higher card, higher side suit; lower card: lower side suit. Suit preference can also be done when you are playing to a trick that you know Declarer will take, but you know partner has led a singleton. Size of your spot card tells partner where your (possible) entry is to give partner a ruff. Suit preference applies when it is crystal clear that partner must shift (e.g., partner leads an Ace in desperation and KQJx shows up in dummy. Your card is suit preference). A singleton in dummy does NOT automatically ask for suit preference. At times, you WANT dummy to ruff (e.g., to take out an entry to a long suit so Declarer cannot get back later or to shorten Dummy's trumps so Declarer cannot finesse a vulnerable trump honor in your hand). Attitude would still apply: high continue (and let Dummy ruff); low: shift (use common sense to figure out logical shift); an abnormally high card asks for unusual shift—suit partner would normally never play, e.g., the AKQJ10 is in dummy but you can trump it.

Remember a basic principle of defense: **Whenever a Defender knows the best line of defense, that Defender should TAKE CONTROL of the partnership's defense.** Be very directive. Do not allow partner an opportunity to go wrong. S/he may not see as clearly as you do what is needed.