

## **COUNT SIGNALS**

**by Maritha Pottenger**

**Standard count signals are given when either Declarer leads a suit, or a suit is led from Dummy.** In such cases, attitude does NOT apply. You are giving count to your partner. Standard count is to play your lowest card from 3 or 5 cards; your second-highest from 4 cards (unless you think it is too valuable—in which case you play your third highest); your top card from a doubleton (unless you feel it is too valuable—often a 10 or higher doubleton is not played first round). With four cards, play your second lowest card on the second round (not lowest—second lowest helps partner distinguish between four cards and a doubleton). This high-low signal when holding 2 or 4 cards is also called an echo.

Some players use upside-down count and attitude. Check the convention cards of your opponents!

**When you and your partner know Declarer's count in a suit** (based on the bidding), **it is not necessary to give count to each other.** You both already have a count on that suit. Giving count would only help Declarer (if s/he pays attention).

**Giving count is vital when Declarer is attacking a side suit** (perhaps in dummy) to setup winners and you or your partner must **figure out how many rounds to duck your Ace** (to exhaust Declarer of cards in that suit) to cut the link between Declarer and Dummy when no outside entries to Dummy are available.

**If your partner has bid a suit and you have supported that suit,** you will usually have 3 or 4 cards in the suit. If partner leads a high honor, your first card would normally be attitude (high if you have the equal honor). If the equal honor is visible in dummy (e.g., partner leads Ace from AKxxx[x] and Qxx is in dummy), your first card should be count (high from 4; low from 3 cards). If the equal honor(s) are visible in dummy and partner knows your count from the bidding (perhaps you made a Bergen raise promising 4 trumps), your first card can now be **suit preference!**

**If the opponents are playing at the 5 or the 6 level, lead the KING** (not the Ace) from AK combinations even if you normally lead the King from AK. This **asks partner to give count** in the suit (so you know whether or not your Ace will cash). The danger is that your ace will be ruffed, establishing the queen in Declarer or Dummy.

**When partner shows out of a suit** (telling Declarer your exact count in that suit), **give count** immediately so partner knows what is happening.

**When you lead the Ace of a suit you bid** (and partner did not support), and **KQx(x) shows up in dummy, partner gives count.** Many times, that will tell you whether or not you can give partner a ruff.

### **The Trump Echo**

Signaling in the opponents' trump suit is the reverse of normal signaling. You play high-low (middle-down-up) with three cards and low high with two cards. This allows you to preserve your highest trump for the second or third round (and a possible over-ruff of Dummy or Declarer) and helps partner to count the hand. Some players only echo in trump (to show 3) when they feel it is vital information for partner to have (usually because they can trump something). Giving count does help partner count out the hand; however declarer's trump length is often clear from the auction. And obviously, you would not give count if it sacrifices an unnecessarily high card (e.g., J102—go ahead and play the 2 the first round) or if it helps Declarer identify a vulnerable trump holding (do NOT echo from 3 to the queen—Declarer may place the Queen with you because you have the longer trump holding).