

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

Amit Chakrabarti

13. Defense 101

Defense is the most difficult part of the game for many. To avoid errors as much as possible, you and your partner must give intelligent signals (ethical, of course) to maximize communications between you. Three signals are most common:

The attitude signal: Give this signal when you follow suit after partner leads or when you discard. The standard practice is to play the biggest card you can afford to show positive attitude.

The count signal: Give this signal when you follow suit after the declarer or dummy leads a suit. We assume that since the declarer is playing this suit, defense has no interest in this suit and so attitude is well known. A low-high signal shows an odd number of holding and a high-low shows an even number of holding in this suit.

The suit preference signal: Give this signal when you return a suit for partner to ruff. Let's say you know at some point during the play that partner will be ruffing clubs in their 4S contract. You would lead a small club asking him to return a diamond after he ruffs (if you have the D ace for example, so that you can get in again and give him another ruff) and would lead a big club (the biggest club card that you can afford so that there is no ambiguity) for him to return a heart after he ruffs (if you have the H ace instead, so that you can get in again and give him another ruff).

Another situation where suit preference signal becomes active is when there is a singleton in dummy and partner leads the Ace, for example. Continuing the suit is useless most of the time (but not always, I must add). Since attitude is probably not important at this stage, you would play a big card to show preference for the higher ranking suit and a small card to show preference for the lower ranking suit.

One very good book on this subject is "**Partnership Defense in Bridge**" by Kit Woolsey. Kit Woolsey has been recently included to the *Bridge Hall of Fame*. Woolsey is a great player and is well known for his another terrific book called "Matchpoints" which I will write about in a future column.

I am picking up a few examples from Woolsey's book to show how partnerships can maximize their defensive communications. I really cannot do justice to the book in this short write up. If you are trying to develop a *serious bridge partnership* with someone, this book is a must read. If both you and your partner (reading alone will not work) both read this book seriously, your defense will improve substantially.

Example 1:

N	E	S	W
		1S	2H
4S	5H	6S	P
P	P		

You are on lead as West and your holding is

```

x
A Q J 9 8 7
x x x
T 9 8
  
```

You lead the A of H and the dummy hits with

```

      Q T 9 x x x      x      K J T      Q x x
  
```

Partner plays the 6. Is this positive attitude or suit preference? Continuing hearts makes no sense, so you shift to a diamond. This sets the contract as partner has the A of diamond. Otherwise declarer (who has 5S and 6Cs) gets rid of all dummy's diamonds in his long Cs.

Example 2:

N	E	S	W
1D	P	1S	P
2S	P	3D	P
4S	P	P	P

You are on lead as West and your holding is:

```

x
A K J T x
x x
J T 9 x x
  
```

You lead the A of hearts and the dummy hits with:

```

      K Q J T      x x      A K x x      x x x
  
```

On your A of hearts, partner plays the 9 and declarer the 6. You continue with the K, partner following with the 2 and declarer with the Q. What should you do next?

Obviously the Q by declarer is not a falsecard. So if you continue hearts, you give him a ruff and sluff. That is considered the gravest error in Bridge world --- so grave that even caddies talk about that in their free time. However, you **must** trust partner. If partner wanted a club shift, he would not have played high-low in hearts just because he had two hearts. **Your partner is good enough to know when to follow mechanical rules and when not to.** That means you need to continue hearts! Partner probably has the K of Clubs and long trumps with trump control (the Ace).

Here is the full hand:

Partner:	A x x x	9 8 x x	T x	K x x
Declarer:	9 8 x x	Q 6	Q J 8 5 4	A Q

The declarer must ruff the third H at hand or at the board. It does not matter. Now, partner can duck two rounds of trump, win the third round and play another heart, setting up his long trump. Ruff and sluff is the only way to set this contract.

*(Further Comments: Example 2 is a particularly intriguing hand. In a few weeks I will discuss an advanced defensive agreement called the **Obvious Shift Principle**. If you have an **established partnership**, you may want to include that technique in your tool kit.)*

Example 3:

This example deals with a similar situation. Keep in mind that bridge is a game for thinking people and not for folks who just follow rules blindly.

N	E	S	W
=====			
P	P	1H	2S
3H	P	4H	P
P	P	P	P

Partner leads the A of spades. Dummy hits with:

Q x	Q J 8	K 8 x x	9 x x x
-----	-------	---------	---------

I hold as East:

9 x
A x x
Q J T x
Q T x x

What do I play? I was going for the 9 of spades and then I realized the golden rule: I don't have to play high-low just because I have two spades! In this hand, I do not want to over-ruff the dummy. So I should

play the 2 of spades. My partner is very sharp. She goes to the tank for a while and then returns a trump which is the only winning defense. The hidden hands are:

Partner (West)	A K J T x x	x x	9 x x	8 x
Declarer	8 x x	K T 9 x x	A x	A K J

Corollary: If I had the K of hearts instead of the A, I would play the 9 of spades at the first trick.