Defensive Signals

Attitude Signals

These tell partner whether you like or dislike a particular suit. Playing "High to Encourage", we play a high card if we like partner's lead. Similarly, when we discard, we can play a high card to help partner decide which suit we like. Sometimes, we can't afford to discard a high card in the suit we like. Instead, play a low card in a different suit. Hopefully, partner can work out which suit to play.

	♠QJT7 ♥A7 ♦KJ53 ♣T86	
♠A42 ♥JT93 ♦87 ♣KJ52		♠86 ♥Q542 ♦T942 ♣A93
	♠K953 ♥K86 ♦AQ6 ♣Q74	

Against 4S, West makes the safe lead of HJ. Holding most of the high cards in defence, to would be too risky to find the killing club lead. Declarer wins HA, disguising his HK. However, East plays H2, a discouraging card. Declarer now plays on trumps. West could take his ace early but he will be unsure which minor to try. By delaying his SA until the 3rd round, West will get a powerful discard from his partner – C9. Now, West can shift to a low club, scooping declarer's CQ on the return and setting the contract. Declarer might stop trumps after two rounds. Then, he frantically plays on diamonds to discard a club. However, West ruffs the 3rd round and easily finds the club shift.

Count Signals

Count signals tell partner the number of cards which you hold in the suit. Play high – low to show that you started with an *even* number of cards in the suit. Play low – high to show that you started with an *odd* number of cards. This is called giving "natural count". It is common to play "Count in declarer's suit where appropriate". There is nothing worse than faithfully giving count to partner, only to find declarer uses it against you! When declarer runs a long long suit, it is frequently useful to give count in your discards to help partner to know which suit to keep.

	♠A74 ♥954 ♦86 ♣KQJT4	
♠KQJ5 ♥T7 ♦T9532 ♣32		♠963 ♥J832 ♦QJ7 ♣A86
	♠T82 ♥AKQ6 ♦AK4 ♣975	

Against 1NT – 3NT, partner finds the excellent lead of SK, on which you play S9 (*high to enc*). You, but not partner, know that SA must be knocked out to remove the entries to those good clubs. Partner continues spades until declarer takes the 3rd round (cutting you off from returning a spade when you gain the lead). Declarer now starts on the clubs. *When should you take your ace*? If declarer has only two clubs, you want to take the 2nd lead giving him just one trick in the suit. If declarer has 3 clubs, you must take the 3rd lead. Otherwise declarer enjoys 4 club tricks. If declarer has 4 clubs, you have no hope. The answer is "*Partner will tell you when to take it*!" West carefully plays the C3 then C2 showing that he started with two clubs. Now, you know the club layout and declarer should fail in 3NT scoring just 1S+3H+2D+2C.

I once played an event with an expert. I said "*What about the count?*"

"*Ken, when you need count, I'll be giving it to you*."

I nodded my head wisely, having no idea what I had just agreed to!

Suit Preference (SP) Signals

If playing SP, a low card asks for the lower of the remaining suits. A high card asks for the higher of the remaining suits. Most established pairs play SP in two situations:-

- When it is clear from dummy that partner must change suits. e.g. You bang down ace of our suit and a singleton appears in dummy. Partner's card will be SP, giving a suggestion of the suit to which you should shift.
- When leading a card which you expect partner to ruff, the card which you lead is SP. A low card asks for the lower suit back. A "highish" card asks for the higher suit. It is frequently the 2nd ruff which defeats declarer.

	♠KJ94 ♥KJT6 ♦KQ4 ♣86	
♠72 ♥Q82 ♦T98652 ♣97		♠AQT5 ♥97 ♦A73 ♣T532
	♠863 ♥A543 ♦J ♣AKQJ4	

Against 4H, west might find the killing lead, S7. S9 from dummy and east wins ST. Now SA, as west completes the "peter". West is going to ruff the next spade. Which spade should east lead? He must lead SQ, asking for the higher suit back (diamonds!). After the ruff, West leads DT to DA, suggesting another of the higher suit, spades. east leads his 4th spade. West now might win HQ for a two trick defeat. Notice that, if west had returned the more attractive club, declarer makes his contract. HA and HK clears the trumps. Then, play 5 club tricks pitching dummy's 3 diamonds.