

The Revision Club System
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PART XI – Defensive Carding Agreements

OPENING LEADS

This opening lead system is mostly taken from the Granovetters' book, *Bridge Additions '95*. It makes as much sense as anything else I have seen.

Of course, carding methods do not properly make up any part of a bidding system. You can play any carding methods you like, and leave the bidding unchanged. However, I thought it worthwhile to present the methods that I like and which I have found to work well. One thing I would like to do here is say a few words about carding methods I do *not* like, and which I recommend that you avoid (regardless of whether you take up my own ideas or not). There are not as many bad or just plain nutty ideas about card play out there as there are about bidding, but there are a few. First of all, any method based on odd/even, whether it is in follow-suit signals or in discarding, should be rejected. Methods based on relative size of spot cards – which is to say, normal ones – have the great advantage that if you have a choice of spot cards to play at all, one of them will always be the highest, one the lowest, and so on. They can't be the same size. However, it is possible to hold all odd, or all even. Quite apart from the technical question of finding an acceptable card to play when all of the spots in a particular suit are of the wrong parity, there are the ethical problems that arise when you struggle to find a play. Partner also knows you are playing odd/even, and it is very unlikely that he will not notice, and very probably figure out just what your problem is. This leads to some signals being taken more seriously than others. Of course, many people have observed that the same problem always exists with pairs who play odd/even; I'm not the first. So why does anyone play that way? There are no technical advantages to odd/even that argue for its adoption, or at least, none that I know of. So forget odd/even.

I will also urge you to forget Rusinow, at least in the extended version played by Journalist-lead users and others. There are just too many situations where you have to lead highest in your suit, from shortness or for other reasons. There is no way I know of to avoid having a complicated list of exceptions to the general rule. This is another example of the type of problems that come up when you try to play ace from ace-king (discussed later). If you are going to have a rule about what card to lead from certain honor combinations, make it be a rule you can follow.

There are some carding systems out there that do make sense, but that I wouldn't be willing to play. First place goes to Lajos Linczmayer's ideas, as presented in his book *Natural Solutions to Defensive Problems*. In LL's methods, almost every spot card that can be played to any trick carries some sort of message. While his methods seem to work, at least in his example deals, I can't see playing them at a pace that would be even remotely acceptable. For me at least, signals need to be relatively clear, delivered as early in the play as possible, and there shouldn't be too many of them.

Against notrump:

AKJ10(x)(x) – asks for drop or count. If the missing queen shows in dummy, give count. But against a gambling-type bid, this also changes from its normal meaning. Now it could be an unsupported ace, led in an effort to hold the lead while looking at dummy, so partner simply gives attitude.

AKx(x) – asks for attitude. Also from **AKJx** or the like. But **AKxxx(x)** usually leads fourth-best.

KQJ(x)(x) – asks for attitude. Also **KQ10(x)**.

KQ109(x)(x) – asks for drop or attitude. Also **AKQ109(x)**. But if the jack shows in dummy, give count. A positive attitude signal would usually mean the ace (but if as third hand, you can determine that the jack must fall, overtake the king with the ace).

QJx – asks for attitude. Also **QJ10(x)(x)**, **QJ9(x)(x)**.

QJ98(x)(x) – asks for drop of 10, or attitude. You do not have to lead the jack here if you think giving partner the information that you hold the queen is more important.

J10(x) – asks for attitude. Also from **J108(x)**. The jack is zero or one higher. The higher card can be the ace, king or queen.

AJ109(x), **AJ108(x)** – asks for attitude. In this case and the next, third hand will normally play high with the other high honor, and can also play the queen to show partner where it is.

KJ109(x), **KJ108(x)** – asks for attitude.

109(x)(x) – asks for attitude. The 9 always promises exactly one higher card.

A1098(x) – asks for attitude. The ten is always one higher card, either the ace, king, or queen (but not the jack).

K1098(x) – same.

Q1098(x) – same.

A98x(x)(x) – asks for attitude. This is to trap the 10 in dummy when partner has the jack. This method was suggested by the Granovetters in *Bridge Additions '96*. Ever since I learned of the existence of this treatment, I have been keeping an eye out for deals where this lead could have been made, and it seems clear that it wins more than it loses (compared to leading low).

K98x(x)(x) – same.

Q98x(x)(x) – same.

J98x(x)(x) – same.

98(x)(x) – asks for attitude. Not the nine, which promises a higher card.

xx(x) – usually lead high here. But not the nine, unless you must lead from 9x.

From broken length headed by an honor, lead fourth best or third best from three. The fourth-best rule applies to such holdings as AJ1042. We do not show the interior sequence unless the fourth card is the 8 or 9. From AJ98(x) or KJ98(x), lead the 8. However, if partner already knows you have five (as for example if you opened 1M, guaranteeing a five-card major), it is permissible to lead the lowest so as to preserve your spots.

Against suits:

AKx(x) – asks for attitude. Also from AKJx or the like. Not “ace from ace-king,” except with AK doubleton. John Lowenthal used to say that ace from ace-king was a form of cheating. He claimed that a slow ace was always unsupported, but when it hit the table fast, it promised the king as well. Naturally I do not accuse the many top pairs who play this way of being cheaters. No doubt *they* can lead unsupported aces in tempo, when there is no better lead. But *I* can't, so I would rather avoid the ethical problem. Leading king is simpler in other ways as well. In his book *Defensive Signals*, Marshall

Miles points out eight or so situations where you should agree to lead the king from ace-king, instead of the ace, even if you normally lead the ace. I don't want the job of trying to memorize the exceptions and figure out when they apply. The king is fine anyway, except in the Bath Coup situation, which is rare, and anyone good enough to play with me will always read it correctly. It should be noted that Bob Hamman and some other top players lead king from ace-king, so the treatment can hardly be labeled inferior. I feel strongly about this one. King from ace-king is easier to play.

KQ(x)(x) – asks for attitude. Also **KQJ(x)**, **KQ10(x)**.

KQ109(x)(x) – asks for drop or attitude.

AKQ(x)(x) – asks for count. Partner is presumed to know where the ace and king are.

QJx(x) – asks for attitude. Also **QJ9(x)(x)**.

QJ98(x)(x) – asks for drop of 10, which is optional, or attitude.

J10(x) – asks for attitude. Also from **J108(x)**. The jack is zero or one higher. Against suit contracts, the higher one must be the king, since you would not underlead the ace.

KJ109(x), **KJ108(x)** – asks for attitude.

109(x)(x) – asks for attitude. The 9 always promises one higher card.

K1098(x) – asks for attitude. The ten is always one higher card, either the king or queen (not the jack).

Q1098(x) – same.

K98x(x)(x) – asks for attitude. This is to trap the 10 in dummy when partner has the jack.

Q98x(x)(x) – same.

J98x(x)(x) – same.

98(x)(x) – asks for attitude. Not the nine, which promises a higher card.

xxx – usually lead low here. But not when you have raised partner in this suit.

xxxx – lead fourth-best, usually. Second-highest is also OK.

xx – high from doubleton.

From other length, whether headed by an honor or not, lead fourth best or third best from three. In his book on opening leads, Blackwood claimed to have reviewed every world championship book published up until that time (1985), and not to have found a single hand where leading third-and-low was better. I have played third-best with many partners and never noticed it to help anything. It seems to be one of those treatments that sounds like a good idea in theory but doesn't accomplish anything useful. It does create problems when you lead the 7 from K1074 and partner thinks you have a doubleton. It also sometimes happens that the third-best card needs to be retained for trick-taking purposes. Old-fashioned treatments sometimes work best. We do not play "modern scientific" treatments just to show that we know how, but only when they work better. It is worth noting that Hamman-Soloway and Zia-Rosenberg (when those partnerships existed) played fourth best against suits and did not seem to suffer for it.

The dispute between fourth-best and third-best leads is really a case of the age-old dispute between attitude and count signals. In virtually all other situations where there is a choice, such as in signaling as third hand to partner's opening lead, attitude has been found to be better. (I should add that this is the consensus of American experts. I know that in other parts of the world, the opposite opinion is held. I don't know why this should be, since this is an argument that can and should be decided on the basis of what is observed to work best, and not on stylistic preferences such as exist in bidding methods.) I agree, and I hold that attitude is important on opening leads too. Fourth-best leads are a sort of mixed signal. Some count information is given, although not always as accurately as with third-and-low, but attitude information is also given, since the fourth-best spot is far more often low enough to be read as a low card. My experience is that the attitude inference is more important, and that it is worth giving up some accuracy in count information in order to keep it.

All of the above lead conventions apply to trick one only. After that, play old-fashioned honor leads, when leading other than a low card, with this exception: Jack or ten shows zero or two higher. The sight of dummy is presumed to tell partner anything he needs to know about location of missing honors.

SIGNALS

Upside-down count and attitude against everything. This includes discards. But suit-preference signals are given in regular order.

An honor lead that reveals a singleton in dummy in the suit led still calls for an attitude signal. A negative signal suggests a switch to the obvious suit, just as it does in other situations. Dropping an honor unnecessarily (like when you are known to hold a long suit, such as after opening a weak two or one of a major) suggests the non-obvious switch. Don't bother to throw the king from KQJ on partner's ace lead to call for a continuation; just play a low card to ask for more, then play the highest one later to show the sequence. (But when you are not known to hold a long suit, throwing an honor is top of a sequence. And you can throw the queen from QJ(x)(x) when partner leads king against a suit, to show the possible entry, whenever there is a chance the second round of the suit will go through. Of course, you do not have to throw the queen when you would prefer a shift to another suit.)

In cashout situations which must be obvious to both players, such as defending five-level contracts, count can be substituted for attitude on partner's king lead.

Our one special signal is the Switch Signal (invented by Glen Ashton). When declarer first leads a suit on his own, playing low is neutral. Throwing a higher spot card than necessary means switch from the opening lead suit. This applies to both partners, and it also applies when an attitude signal has been given at trick one. If leader's partner signals he likes the lead, and then signals for a switch, it means he also has something in the obvious-shift suit. Likewise, opening leader signals switch when he wants another suit led through declarer if partner gains the lead. This applies to both notrump and suits. After the first time declarer plays a suit on his own, both partners are presumed to know which suits they should be leading, and signaling on declarer's leads reverts to upside-down count. But bear in mind that playing Switch Signal, a play of the lowest card by the putative signaler does not necessarily mean that he likes the lead. It often only means that he can't afford to play any other card. The signal that should be taken seriously is the play of an unnecessarily high spot card, in a situation where it is clear that a lower spot could have been played.

The Switch Signal does not apply when the opening lead was a trump. After an initial trump lead, both defenders are presumed to be able to figure out whether or not it would be a good idea to continue leading trumps. After a trump lead, when declarer first gains the lead, he will either lead more trumps, or a side suit. When declarer continues trumps, defenders give suit-preference with their remaining trump spots, if they can. The preference is between the two most logical suits for the defense to play; one of the three possible side suits (usually the strongest in dummy) will be rejected as an illogical shift for us.

After an initial trump lead, when declarer plays a side suit after first gaining the lead, we play high or low to indicate preference between the other two side suits.

When third hand has played high to a lead, and then discards or returns the lead later, he plays upside-down original count. That is, if he originally held four, he plays lowest next. From three or five, he usually leads a card higher than his lowest remaining.

There has been some grumbling that Smith-type signals (and Switch is a subspecies of these) lead to ethical problems, because of players stopping to think about what signal to give. Hamman and Rosenberg are said to be in this camp. My own view is that Switch is only a form of attitude signal, and there is no reason to believe that it cannot be delivered with the same ethical tempo as any other attitude signal. Remember, it only applies to the opening-lead suit, and only to some subsequent trick. This means you always have time to think. When dummy comes down, both leader and third hand should consider whether they want to suggest a switch. Third hand thus should use his allotted thirty seconds or so to think both about what card to play to the present trick, and about whether he is going to want to give a Switch Signal later when declarer plays a suit. It ought to be possible to make up your mind in advance almost all of the time. If you find yourself caught napping when declarer initiates a suit, just snap a low card. It will most likely be what you would have played anyway, and if it isn't, you will pay more attention next time. You only give a Switch Signal when you have thought about it in advance and have already decided you want a switch. I don't think that this signaling method is more likely to lead to UI than other situations where you may have to think about what to play. You can't play every card in the same tempo. Bridge is not bullet chess or low-limit poker, where you are expected to make decisions virtually instantaneously almost all the time, and it is understood that if you don't, you will be punished for it (by the clock in chess, by the wrath of the other players in poker). If bridge weren't complicated enough that you have to think sometimes, the game wouldn't be worth playing. I have kibitzed both Hamman and Rosenberg plenty of times, and neither is shy about taking time when needed. Serious bridge, which is what I have in mind, requires serious thought, and as long as you do what you can to avoid giving your partner obvious readouts, we all have to live with the variations in tempo.