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(62) Defense: Defensive Carding and Signals (UDCA)

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General

Defense is the hardest part of Bridge. Declarer has several advantages over the Defenders: He can see all of his side's cards (assets) and he has no partner to get in the way of what he is trying to accomplish. In order to be successful on defense we will need to work hard with our partner – both on forming agreements before we defend a hand and on communicating with each other during the defense.

The way that we work with partner is to understand that the cards we play when we are not winning a trick can be (should be) used to communicate with partner. These cards mean something, so PAY ATTENTION! These cards will have different meanings in different situations (Attitude, Count, or Suit Preference.) Let's look at some of these situations.

Count Signals

Count Signals Summary

When the Declarer is leading a suit we give count. We do so when the Declarer is leading from their hand or when they are leading from the dummy. We give count when we are playing as second hand or if we are playing last to the trick (4th hand to play). Of course, one important thing to remember is that we do not give count if we need to try to win the trick – “Play Bridge First!”

How To Give Count

When it is our turn to play (after Declarer has led) and we are not involved in winning the trick then we want to use our play to try to communicate some useful information to partner. The information that is most useful is our *Count* in the suit. (Count is more useful than Attitude because this is a suit that the Declarer is playing on and thus we are not likely to like the suit.) Count is the number of cards we have in that suit. Unfortunately, we cannot tell partner the exact number of cards

that we have in a suit – that is too complicated. But what we can do is try to let partner know our *parity* in the suit – if we have an even or odd number of cards.

Here is how we give Count (in Standard Carding):

- If we have an odd number of cards in a suit then we play them up the line – start with our lowest card the first time declarer plays the suit and the next time the suit is led we play a higher card. Partner will see that we played them “in order” or “up the line” and know that we have an odd number of cards in the suit.
- If we have an even number of cards in a suit then we play “high-low.” That is, we start by playing the highest card we can afford (without giving up a trick) and on the second round of the suit we play a lower card. Partner will see that we played high-low (also called a *Echo* or *Peter*) and know that we have an even number of cards in the suit.

Notice that in both of these cases partner did not know for sure our count when the first round the suit was played. But our first card can still be useful to partner. On the first round of a suit partner will have to interpret our card – determine if it is low or high. Knowing that this is the case, we want to be sure to make as clear a signal as possible for partner. That means if we are trying to play a low card, we should play the lowest card we have. And if we are trying to play a high card then we should play the highest card we can afford (the highest of equals for sure!) Partner should keep in mind that our first card may not always be clear. *Cards are relative, not absolute – Sometimes a low card looks high or a high card can look low.* If we are giving count from Q109 then we are going to have to play the 9 on the first round (it is our lowest card.) And if we are giving count from 5432 we are going to play the 5 on the first round (it is our highest card.) In both cases our count will not become clear to partner until the second round of the suit – where we will play another card that will clarify our original signal.

Once we have given partner our Count in a suit then they will have to do some work to make use of the information. They will have to determine if we have 1, 3, 5, or 7 cards OR 2, 4, 6, or 8 cards in the suit. They will make this determination by using other information available on the hand (they will usually be able to figure it out relatively quickly.) Once they have determined how many cards we have in the suit they will also have to figure out how to make use of that information to help our side defend better. This information will not always be useful to partner early in the hand, but as they acquire more and more information about our hand and declarer’s hand it will help them solve problems.

Note: Don't give a count signal that may cost a trick. If we have Qx in a suit, do not play the Queen on the first round - that will likely cost a trick. Count signals are always given the with "highest card we can afford to play without giving up a trick!"

Attitude Signals

Attitude Signals Summary

When partner leads a suit we (generally) give an Attitude Signal. If partner's card is holding the trick we tell them if we like the suit or not (Attitude Signal.) If partner's lead is being won by the second hand (and we can not win the trick) then we give an Attitude Signal (unless Attitude is known.)

How to Show Attitude

When it is our turn to play (after partner has led a suit) and we are not involved in trying to win the trick (our first priority is always to try to win the trick) then we shouldn't just play a random card. Our card should (and does) mean something and that thing is an *Attitude Signal*. Our Attitude is how we feel about the suit that partner has lead - do we like it or do we not like it.

Here is how we show our Attitude (in Standard Carding):

- If we like the suit that partner has led we play a high card (start an *Echo* or *Peter*) - Encouraging.
- If we do not like the suit that partner led then we play a low card - Discouraging.

Notice that in both of these cases partner did not know for sure our Attitude when the first round the suit was played. But our first card can still be useful to partner. On the first round of a suit partner will have to interpret our card - determine if it is low or high. Knowing that this is the case, we want to be sure to make as clear a signal as possible for partner. That means if we are trying to play a low card then we should play the lowest card we have. And if we are trying to play a high card then we should play the highest card we can afford (the highest of equals for sure!) Partner should keep in mind that our first card may not always be clear. *Cards are relative not absolute - Sometimes a low card looks high or a high card can look low.* If we are giving Attitude from Q32 then we are going to have to play the 3 to encourage on the first round (it is our highest card we can afford.) And if we are giving Attitude from 1098 we are going to play the 8 on the first round (it is our lowest card.) In both cases our Attitude will not become clear to partner until the second round of the suit - where we will play another card that will clarify our original signal.

Once we have given partner an Attitude Signal in a suit then they will have to do some work to make use of the information. They will have to determine what our holding in the suit is (based on what we have told them.) Once they have determined what our likely holding in the suit is then they can combine this information with other information that they have about the hand in order to make a determination how best to defend the rest of the hand.

Agreements

One of the most important parts of good defense is having good agreements with your partner. Here we will go over what we need to clarify related to signaling.

Basic List of Agreements

- Declarer leads a suit – we give count.
- Partner leads a suit -
 - We give Attitude if partner's card is holding the trick.
 - We give Attitude if Second Hand (often Dummy) is winning the trick with the Ace or King.
 - We give Count if Second Hand is winning the trick with the Queen or cheaper (if we can not beat the Queen or lower, Partner already knows our Attitude.)
- If Attitude and Count are already known or irrelevant we give Suit Preference
 - Example: When partner leads an Ace and there is a singleton on the dummy (vs. a suit contract.)
 - Example: When partner leads the Ace and the KQx hits on the dummy (vs. a notrump contract.)
- Primary Signal Attitude, Secondary Signal Count, Tertiary Signal Suit Preference.

There are many other agreements that you and partner can make as you improve and evolve as defenders. The most important thing is for you and partner to be “on the same page” – have the same understandings about what is going on during the defense.

UDCA (*Advanced*)

Most expert players play a variation from Standard Carding called Upside-Down Count and Attitude (UDCA.) This is exactly what it sounds like – it is making both our Count and Attitude Signals “Upside-Down.” *Upside-Down means the opposite of Standard Carding.*

- Upside-Down Attitude means that we use low cards to Encourage and high cards to Discourage.
- Upside-Down Count means that we use low cards (playing “up the line”) to show an Even number of cards in a suit and high cards (echos) to show an Odd number of cards in a suit.

The more useful of these two agreements is Upside-Down attitude (many players play upside-down attitude and remain with standard count.) Upside-Down attitude allows us to Encourage with low cards in the suits we like – letting us save the high cards that we might need in order to take future trick. Additionally, our low cards are generally clearer than our high cards (a 2 is clearly low, while a 7 may be high

or low) and we want partner to be certain about the suits we like. Upside-Down Count is primarily played to complicated things for the declarer and to make some issues with upside down Attitude work more smoothly.

Note: Upside-Down Count (or UDCA) requires us to have some additional complex agreements. We need to have more discussion with partner on several new topics. Before you play this set of agreements you should be sure that you understand these issues and that you have clear understandings with your partner. If you do not, then confusion can easily arise in complex and difficult situations at the table:

- Remainder Count (vs. Original Count)
- Return Count
- Shift Count
- Delayed Return Count

Conclusion

There are many challenging aspects of good Defense. But one of the most important is to have good agreements with partner. These agreements should be combined with good communication and hard work interpreting partner's signals to give us the ability to defend each hand well. Defense is the hardest part of bridge and you and partner will make mistakes and get things wrong. But learning to signal and communicate with partner is a vital part of exchanging the information you need in order to defend your best.