

### 10/25/11 Club Appreciation Teams – Count!

Bd 18 [rotated]	♠ KQJ94	
W Deals	♥ K8432	
N-S Vul	♦ —	
	♣ 984	
		♠ A1052
		♥ AQJ1065
		♦ 3
		♣ Q3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	1♥	Double
Pass	2♠	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♠	Pass	5♦
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♥9. Declarer plays small in dummy and ruffs in hand. She then produces the ♠7, West follows with the ♠8, and dummy the ♠J. You are West – what do you do?

- If you duck the ♠A, you will lose it when declarer has a singleton.
- If you win ♠A, and declarer has another spade, she will use it to get to dummy and discard something on the remaining spade honor.

Bd 18 [rotated]	♠ KQJ94	
W Deals	♥ K8432	
N-S Vul	♦ —	
	♣ 984	
♠ 83		♠ A1052
♥ 97		♥ AQJ1065
♦ Q842		♦ 3
♣ J10652		♣ Q3
	♠ 76	
	♥ —	
	♦ AKJ109765	
	♣ AK7	

Clearly you should duck! No, not just because you can see now that declarer has two spades, but because partner has given you a *count signal*.

Take a look at the situation. You and dummy have nine spades between you, declarer has led the tenth, a sneaky ♠7, and partner played ♠8. The only missing cards in the suit are ♠63, and both are lower than the 8. Partner must have a lower card in the suit, unless she has a singleton. Since declarer never raised spades, she is unlikely to have three, so the ♠8 must be the start of a high-low, showing an *even* number of cards. Now that you know how the cards lie, can you tell what to do?

If you duck the first spade lead and win the second, declarer can never get to dummy to enjoy a second spade winner, and must eventually lose a club as well as a trump – one down. See that nothing can happen to your ♠A, once you know declarer has another spade.

Note that if West thinks this hand is too boring to be bothered with and plays the ♠3 on the first lead, or if you don't watch the play to this trick, you will be reduced to a guess.

In that case, you should probably do what the actual East did, take the ♠A. The contract can still be defeated if either defender leads a spade while West has the fourth trump, but this also did not happen at the table. That play is also more difficult to find – especially since both players should assume East took the correct spade in the first place (meaning declarer has no more). Leading a spade once declarer is out would give declarer *two* discards.

***Counting, signals, and paying attention are the best way to improve your game.*** This is crucial, and it's not easy. Once a trick has been turned over, it's too late to wake up and ask to see that signal you missed. Count and pay attention – easier said than done.

A summary of standard defensive signals is on the next page.

- Pete Matthews

(Note that I tweaked the spade spots in the East and South hands to make a better example.)

# Standard American Defensive Signals

Small cards are used by defenders to communicate important information to each other – in a legal way. (It's not fair to agree to wink when you like partner's lead.)

The usual signal is to choose either a high worthless card (starting a *high-low*) or a low worthless card (starting a *low-high*), when first following suit or discarding, to convey a message. Usually the cards from 2 to 9 are used for this purpose, but sometimes higher cards are employed.

**Attitude:** Follow suit or discard high-low to say you like the suit that you play. Play low-high to say you don't.

**Count:** Play high-low to say you have an *even* number of cards in the suit. Play low-high to show an *odd* number of cards.

**Suit Preference:** Play a high card to ask for the lead or indicate strength in a high suit. Play a low card for a low suit. Play a middle card for something else: continuation of the current suit, a trump, no preference, etc. Usually there are only two likely suits to prefer.

**Standard Rules:** When *we* lead, the primary signal is *attitude*. When *they* lead, the primary signal is *count*. *Suit preference* applies only in specialized situations, such as when giving partner a ruff, looking for a ruff yourself, or when declarer or dummy will surely ruff the next round of the current suit. When your attitude is known – either because of a prior signal or because you cannot beat the winning card played by dummy – give count. However, don't signal when only declarer would benefit, or if it might cost you a trick!

**Example 1:** Partner opens in hearts, and South declares at a contract of 5♦. Dummy has ♠KQJ94 ♥K8432 ♦— ♣984, and you hold ♠83 ♥97 ♦Q842 ♣J10652. Declarer trumps your lead of the ♥9 and leads a spade. You must play the ♠8, a *count* signal when *they* lead, showing an *even* number of cards.

**Example 2:** The opponents play in 3NT, partner leads ♥K, and you hold ♥A94. Play the ♥9, an *attitude* signal. You want partner to lead a small heart to your ace, so you can lead the 4 back for her to run the suit. However, had you instead held ♥974, you would play the ♥4, asking partner to lead something else. Signals are not commands – if partner's hearts are headed by ♥KQJ, as opposed to ♥KQT, she will likely continue hearts.

**Example 3:** The opponents have the auction to themselves: 1♠ – 2♦; 3♦ – 4♠. You are on lead, holding: ♠83 ♥97654 ♦A842 ♣A63. If you consider that auction, you should see a way to take the first four tricks and set the contract! How many diamonds does partner have? Well, you have four, dummy bid the suit (at least four), and declarer should have four for an immediate raise. Can you count to 13? Partner has a singleton or void in diamonds. Lead the ♦A, and whatever anybody does, lead the ♦2 next, a *suit preference* signal for the lower side suit, clubs. Partner ruffs this trick and obediently returns a club. You win and give her a second ruff.