

Defensive Carding Agreements

By Nancy Joe

While we all love declaring a bridge hand, we defend twice more than we declare. It is critical to develop carding agreements with your partner about your defensive signals if you want to win at this game. At the last sectional I played in, my partner asked his right hand opponent what their carding agreements were after the opening lead was made. The man hesitated and then stammered, "We're not that good." I was concerned that the pair felt intimidated by the question which is why I wanted to do this talk today.

There are no secret agreements allowed in bridge. When we fill out our convention card, we disclose our lead agreements, such as Ace from A/K, J from KJT_x, or which card we lead from xxx. We disclose whether our defensive signals are standard or upside-down, and what are first discard signifies. It's better to check the opponent's convention card or make inquiries before or right after the opening lead rather than during the middle of the hand. Declarer is allowed to ask questions during the hand, but opponents may be more inclined to false card if they know declarer is really paying attention to the cards they play.

Do you check your opponents' convention card or inquire about their carding agreements? If you do not, then you are allowing the opponents to have secret agreements. They are communicating attitude, count, and suit preference signals to each other with each card they play.

Be aware if the opponents have unusual opening leads.

Rusinow Leads: Leading the lower of touching honors

Examples: Q from KQxx, J from QJTxx

Coded 9s and 10s: Jack denies a higher honor, T or 9 implies 2 higher non-touching honors

Example: J from JTxx, T from KJTxx, 9 from QT9x

Some partnerships have the agreement where the lead of the Ace asks for Attitude and the lead of the King asks for Count.

Defense is hard, but it gets easier when you and your partner are communicating and building a bridge across the table from each other. Every card means something. When following to a trick or discarding, there are three basic signals you can give your partner: attitude, count, or suit preference. The general rule is:

“When partner leads, you give attitude.

When declarer leads, you give count.”

Standard carding: A high card encourages. A low card discourages. To show count, play high-low to show an even number of cards in the suit. Play low-high to show an odd number of cards in the suit.

Upside-down carding: A low card encourages. A high card discourages. To show count play low-high to show an even number of cards in the suit. Play high-low to show an odd number of cards in the suit.

Some pairs like to play upside-down attitude with standard count signals. This may lead to confusion because standard attitude signals work better with standard count signals and upside-down attitude signals work better with upside-down count. I play with one partner who likes to play upside-down attitude with standard count. We solved this dilemma by agreeing that at trick one only, we play standard attitude and count.

First Discard Carding Agreements:

Standard: High card encourages. Low card discourages.

Upside-down: Low card encourages. High card discourages

Lavinthal: You discard a suit you do not like and shows suit preference.

High card shows preference for the higher suit. Low card shows preference in the lower suit

Revolving Discards: You discard from a suit you do not like. If it is a high card, it asks for the higher touching suit. If it is a low card, it asks for the lower touching suit

Odd/Even (Roman): Odd card is encouraging, even card is discouraging and shows suit preference

Positive (what your grandmother taught you): It doesn't matter whether it is a high card or a low card, you discard from a suit you have interest in

Showing Count

If you have previously played to a suit, the 2nd time you follow to the suit, you show present count. Whether you play standard or upside-down count, the rule is that you show "standard present count."

Suit Preference

Suit preference applies when it is obvious that attitude or count information will be of little use to partner. Playing a high card means I like the higher ranking of the other (non-trump) suits. Playing a low card means I like the lower ranking of the other (non-trump) suits. Note: If you and your partner have agreed to play upside-down carding, the normal treatment is a high card indicates interest in the higher ranking of the other (non-trump) suits, and a low card indicates interest in the lower ranking of the other (non-trump) suits, In other words, "upside down suit preference signals"

are not standard treatment among those who play upside-down carding. Some experts are beginning to adopt upside-down suit preference signals.

Notes:

We are all human and sometimes we forget our agreements.

Remember: The opponents are entitled to the express agreements between you and your partner. They are not entitled to “what do you think it is.” Yesterday I opened 1C and my partner who had passed in 1st seat jump shifted to 2D. Our agreement is that a jump shift in the other minor is a limit raise of my opening minor. However, I suspected (accurately) that she had a weak jump shift with 6 diamonds. I alerted (which is correct with either agreement). My left hand opponent asked what it was. I answered that it could be one of two things...then I said but you are entitled only to our agreement which is that it was a Limit Raise in Clubs. Since my left hand opponent held 5 clubs, he didn't think my partner had the limit raise. I bid 3N since I held an 18 count. Before left hand opponent made his opening lead, my partner who was the dummy started to clarify what her bid was and that she had a weak hand with diamonds. I stopped her and said that the opponents were entitled only to our agreements.

This is a game and it has rules. There is a little white paperback book on the desk called *The Laws of Duplicate Bridge*. The director is here and he or she is here to inform us of the procedures following an irregularity.