

## SIGNALS IN NOTRUMP DEFENSE

This chapter will make no mention of such signaling conventions as "odd-even discards," "Lavinthal," etc., because they are self-defeating in the presence of an eavesdropping declarer.

### Giving Count When Following Suit

When desiring to give partner a count of how many cards you hold in a suit, follow with the lowest card from an odd number and the highest you can spare with an even number. In attitude situations a high card is encouraging, a low card discouraging.

Sometimes it is hard to tell whether one should signal. Say dummy holds KQ109 in a suit, and there are no side entries to dummy. Declarer leads a small card toward dummy and you have J873. Should you start a high-low to show four, so partner will know how long to hold up the ace? Yes? Too bad, declarer has Axx and finesses your jack on the third round, thanks to the count you gave.

The solution is to play the 7 on the first round, then follow with the 3 if declarer leads a second low card toward dummy, giving partner (who has the ace) the right count. If declarer plays the ace on the second round, you follow with the 8 and let him make what he will of the 3 on the third round. You would play the same way with 873, of course, if sure that declarer doesn't have a singleton.

Except for such deceptive purposes, always signal as clearly as possible. With 9842, show four by playing the 9, then 2, not a subtle 4, then 2. Partner may need to know the count on the *first* round. In some cases the second part of the signal can serve as suit preference, in which case you would play the 9, then a suit-preference card.

Of course you do not signal length when declarer is playing a suit that requires no hold-up by partner. In that case a suit preference, periscope, Smith echo, or alarm clock signal may be in order.

### Scanian Signals

Scanian signals (modified here) consist of upside-down signaling at times, as preservation of trick-taking ability must take priority over normal signaling:

-- When dummy has a finessable honor

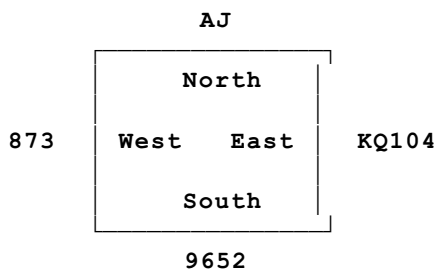
A finessable honor is one that is not accompanied by a touching card. Q102 has two finessable honors, QJ2 has none. The signal applies when following suit and when discarding.

-- When a card in declarer's hand is quite likely finessable.

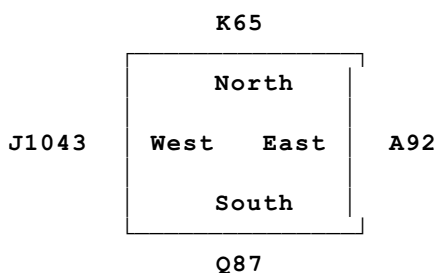
Holding AK92 over declarer, it is not necessary to play the 9 on partner's lead of the jack through declarer's queen. The 2 says "come on."

-- When the third hand to play is following suit with possibly four-card length in the suit and likely cannot spare a high card to encourage.

Examples of Scanian signals:

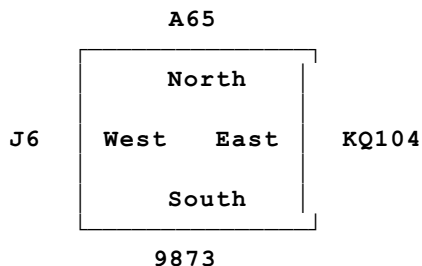


West leads 8, ace played from dummy, East plays the 4 to encourage, not the 10.

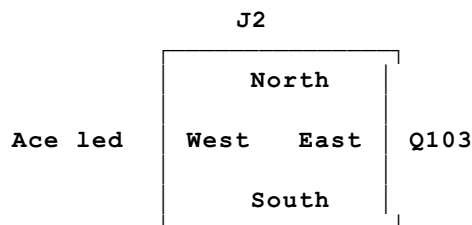


Jack led, 5 played from dummy, East plays the 2 to encourage, not the 9. A good example of why Scanian signals were invented.

Suit-preservation signals apply even when there is not finessable honor in dummy:



West leads the jack of a suit that East has bid, with possible four-card length. When the ace is played, East plays the 4 to encourage, not the 10.



The ace is led against 1NT doubled and East plays the 10 to encourage, promising the queen. This is not a Scanian situation because dummy is not being finessed and suit-preservation (playing the 3) will mislead partner. Moreover, unblocking could be important (as when the lead is from AK93). West will know East has the queen but not the jack and may choose to switch when lacking the 9.

## **Smith Echo**

When partner has led a suit against a notrump contract, playing a high card when following to the first lead of a long opposing suit says that you liked partner's lead: Continue that suit! A lowest card says that you did not like that suit, lead something else if your suit isn't sure to set up. A middle card says partner should do what seems best to him...you have no definite wishes. With only two cards, you can't be neutral, and with a singleton you must signal willy-nilly!

The opening leader can also use the Smith Echo. A high card says, "I want my suit returned!" A lowest card says, "Don't return my suit, there's no future in it." A middle card says, "You can switch or not when you get in, I have no definite opinion."

With three cards you can give shading to these meanings, since there are six possible ways to play three cards. For example, middle card, then up, then low, says you're not sure but probably the first suit should be continued because you are not looking at a good switch suit. Middle, then low, mildly suggests a switch. Low, then high, then middle, says you lean toward a switch but a continuation of the first suit could be all right. Playing the middle card on the second round says that the first signal was a strong one.

With four cards you can really get subtle, but we won't go over the 24 possible ways of playing four cards.

The Smith Echo is not used when a defender must give count in a possible hold-up situation. It only applies when it is obvious that the count will not be of any assistance to partner.

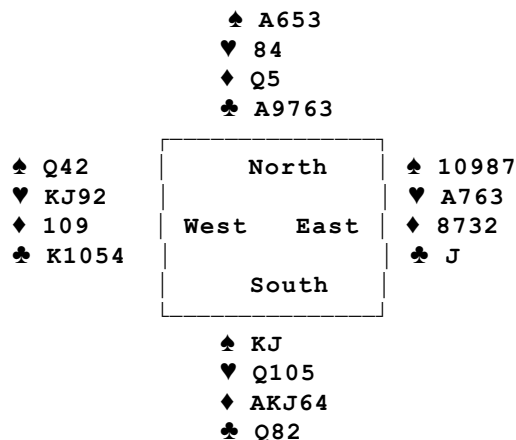
Similarly, the echo does not apply when a defender may be in a false-card situation. Both false-carding and count take preference over the Smith Echo. And, of course, the Smith echo does not apply when an abnormal card might aid declarer's play of his suit.

When it is obvious to everyone at the table that there is no future in the suit led, Smith echo does not apply. This may be an occasion for suit preference or periscope signaling.

Be very careful not to hesitate before playing a card in a Smith Echo situation. Doing so says "I'm not sure," which is an illegal message. If in doubt, play low or high but don't hesitate!

## **Periscope**

When declarer is about to take all the remaining tricks and partner may be eager to know declarer's distribution, a periscope signal may help. The signal shows the count of the highest ranking suit for which count is unknown. Playing a low card at one's first opportunity shows an odd number of cards in that suit, playing a high card shows an even number. Of course it must be obvious to partner that you have a choice of cards to play, and that the card(s) played could not logically be serving some other purpose (count, suit preference).



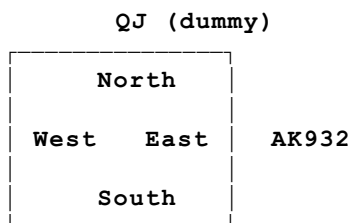
West leads the ♥2 against 3NT, and the defense takes four heart tricks, South discarding 2♣ on the fourth heart. West then exits with a diamond, and South rattles off five fast diamond tricks. On the fifth diamond West must decide whether to blank the ♣K or throw a spade. Meanwhile, East has played the 8♦ and 7♦, a redundant message saying that he has an even number of spades. That makes it easy for West to throw a spade instead of blanking the ♣K. Showing a count of the diamond suit would be pointless in this situation.

Periscope applies only when declarer obviously has most of the remaining tricks. Similar signals are usually suit-preference or attitude when the defenders still have prospects for more than one trick.

### Alarm Clock Signals

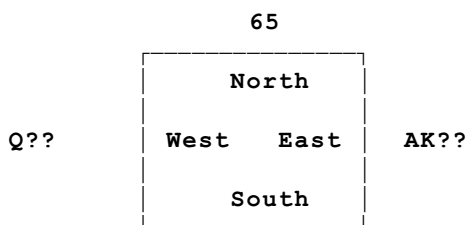
When a defender wants to alert partner to some abnormal situation, or to have him make an abnormal play, or both, he "wakes up" partner by playing in a non-standard fashion. We define "normal" plays as those that preserve one's trick-taking ability. In positions offering a choice, unblocking and overtaking are therefore abnormal plays that can be requested by an alarm clock signal. Playing honor cards in reverse order is a typical alarm clock signal:

A common case of alarm clock signaling comes when partner must be advised whether to unblock or not. The normal play of high cards warns partner not to unblock, abnormal asks that he do so. Example:



South is declarer and East is on lead, in a "cash-out" situation where East-West must immediately grab what tricks they can. East wants West to unblock the 10 if he has it, so he makes the abnormal play of ace, then king. With only AK8xx, East plays the normal king, then ace, whereupon West should not play

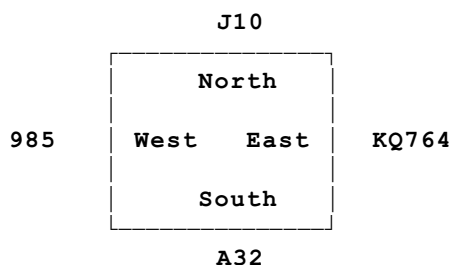
the 10 (but may choose to unblock when holding 109..., hoping partner has the 8, if three tricks won't be sufficient).



West leads a low card against 3NT. If East has the AKJ or AKJ10 and West Qxxxx there is no problem, since declarer's play will tell West what to do. However, suppose East has AK doubleton and West Qxxxxx. Then East should play the ace third hand, followed by the king. This abnormal (alarm clock) play should alert West to play a suit preference card on the king.

Or suppose East has AKJxx. Again he should play the ace, then king, an alarm clock signal telling West to unblock the queen if he started with Qxx, either having led from it or merely following suit to East's lead. (Presumably West can tell this is not from a doubleton AK). East cannot win the king and underlead the ace, because South could have Qx in the suit. If East had started with AKxxx and a quick side entry, he would play the normal king, then ace, and West should not unblock (the abnormal play) with Qxx. With no side entry he would have to lead a low card after winning the king, praying that South does not have a singleton queen at this point. Better yet, he should win with the ace, a falsecard, and return his lowest card. If South has Q10x he will probably go wrong.

Another example:



West leads the 8 of this unbid major against 3NT (the 9 would imply 109). East should play the king, not the queen, on the first trick. When he follows with the queen, West knows to unblock the 9. Playing the queen first would warn against unblocking, which would be fatal if the 7 and 3 were exchanged.

### Discarding from a Sequence

When discarding a card that is part of a three-or-more-card sequence, throw the card you would play when leading the suit. This applies to interior sequences also; throw the 10 from Q1098, K1098, A1098, AJ109 or KJ109, promising higher card(s). From AK(Q) or better, throw the ace, not the king. The king therefore shows KQJ(x). As usual, the jack is thrown from J109..., indicating no higher card.

### Discarding From the Suit You Have Led

-- After leading high from three or five small, discard the highest card you can spare, preferably the top card (present count).

-- After leading high from four small, discard the lowest card (present count).

-- After leading from a sequence, show present count if possible. Lead king from KQ1093, discard 10 next (four cards left). Without the 9, discard the 3 (three cards left).

### **After Following Suit from the Bottom of a Sequence**

After following suit from the bottom of a sequence, play the top of the sequence if you can spare it. After following with the 9 from QJ109, throw the queen when discarding from the suit.

### **After Giving an Attitude Signal**

Continue the signal on the next round of the suit, whether high-low or low-high..

### **After Giving a Count Signal**

It is often necessary to clarify a count signal on the second round of the suit. In general we use the "present count" method:

(1) Having shown an even number of cards (playing the highest that can be spared), with an original four cards play the lowest card next (high-low). From 9862 play the 9 and then the 2. Playing the 9 and then the 8 would show a doubleton..

(2) Having shown an odd number of cards (lowest played first), with an original three play the higher of the two on the next round. After playing the 2 from 962, play the 9. With an original five play the "present count" principle isn't used, because playing high might be taken as showing an original three, so play the original fourth-best next. After playing the 2 from 98742, play the 4 on the next round. This should usually be easy for partner to read.

(3) With an original holding of six or more cards, subtract four from the total and use the above methods.