**On the Defense - Signaling When You Discard**

*A Brief Introduction*

When a card is led and you cannot follow suit, and you either cannot or do not want to trump, you have the opportunity to communicate with your partner by **signaling** with your **discard.** The **first** time you do this is the one which must convey the most accurate message, but players often attempt to provide signals with their discards even beyond the first time. For starters, just focus on the first discard.

Various methods of signaling are used, and each has its advocates. Three of the most-frequently used are:

Standard: High is encouraging and Low is discouraging

Odd-Even: Odd is encouraging and Even is discouraging

**Upside-Down: High for Hate (or Heck No) - discouraging and Low for Like - encouraging**

How do you know whether partner’s discard is high or low?

Sometimes, it’s obvious, but often, we must make an informed guess.

* First, we need to be sure to WATCH for partner’s discard. Sounds simple, but amidst concentrating on so many other factors, this can get overlooked – and then, the opportunity to communicate effectively is lost.
* Next, we need to look in our own hand and at the dummy’s cards to see if we can tell whether partner’s card is high or low - based upon what we can see. Is it reasonable to think that partner might have higher or lower alternatives?

How do you decide whether to give an encouraging signal or a discouraging one?

* First, consider which will provide the clearest signal to partner.
* Consider what you can “afford” to play.
* Against NT, a negative signal takes precedence. You don’t want to throw away cards which could potentially take tricks.
* Against suit contracts, use a positive signal – if you can afford it.

When choosing from “equals,” play the highest or the lowest in the sequence. Be as clear as possible – and, they are all equals.

**Remember: Signaling requires active participation from both partners on the defense.**

**Not only must you remember to give your partner the clearest possible signal on your first discard, you must also remember to watch for partner’s discard!**

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Contract: 3NT South

Lead: 10 clubs KJ

Bidding went 1NT-3NT K43

 J1094

 AJ32 **YOU**

 876 AQ109

 J107 9852

 K65 872

 10987 64

 5432

 AQ6

 AQ3

 KQ5

South begins with four rounds of clubs, forcing you to make two discards. You desperately want partner to lead a spade, and you really can’t afford to discard a spade because you will be giving up a trick. You want to make a discouraging discard in a suit partner might be tempted to lead.

Partner assigns 16 points to South, who opened 1NT and can see 13 high card points in dummy. 16+13=29 + 4 in her own hand = 33. She counts you for having 7 points – pretty close. Now, she just needs your help knowing where to find your points. Your discard signal is your opportunity to communicate! In UPSIDE-DOWN signaling, discard the 9 of hearts.

Now, partner thinks about the bidding. South did not open a major suit. North did not bid Stayman for obvious reasons. Partner can see only five total spades – three in her hand and two in dummy. She knows that you HATE hearts and makes an informed guess that you want a spade lead should she ever be in the lead.

Declarer: South

Contract: 4 spades J98732

Lead: Ace of hearts 643

 KQ

 KQ **YOU**

 10 6

 AKQ72 85

 J974 A106532

 653 10842

 AKQ54

 J109

 8

 AJ97

West leads the Ace of hearts followed by the King. You give count by playing the 8 on the first trick and the 5 on the second trick. Consequently, by counting his hearts and the dummy’s hearts, West knows that Declarer holds three hearts. On the third trick, West plays the Queen of hearts. It’s time for you to discard and signal! What card will you discard on the third trick so that you and partner can set this contract?