

### The Suit Preference Signal (March 8, 2021)

The three basic types of defensive signals include the attitude (see February 22nd notes), the count (see March 1<sup>st</sup> notes), and the suit preference --the focus of today's lesson.

Suit preference signals occur most often where the possibility of a ruff exists. When you know that your partner will be trumping your lead, you need to “tell” him how to regain entry to your hand for a subsequent ruff. The size of the card which you lead for your partner to ruff should be a suit preference signal on how to return to your hand. (See also short-suit leads from the January 25<sup>th</sup> notes.)

Disregarding the trump suit and the suit being led by your partner, of the two remaining suits, one outranks the other, i.e., spades outrank hearts/diamonds/clubs; hearts outrank diamonds/clubs; and, diamonds outrank clubs.

If the card your partner leads back is a high one, your partner is asking for the return of the higher ranking of the two remaining suits. But, if the card he returns is one of a low denomination, partner is implying that you should return the lower ranking of the other two suits.

Let's look at the following example:

**North**

KJx  
KQJxx  
Jx  
Jxx

**West**

10x  
3  
Q1098x  
Q109xx

**East**

xx  
A1082  
Axxx  
Kxx

Bidding: S W N E  
1S P 2H P  
2S P 4S P  
P P

**South**

AQxxxx  
xxx  
Kx  
Ax

Contract: 4 spades

Opening Lead: 3 of hearts

Play of the Hand:

Against 4S, West leads the three of hearts. East, recognizing that it is a singleton, wins with the ace and leads back the 10 of hearts for his partner to ruff. The ten of hearts is a suit preference signal telling West that he should lead back a diamond. If East had held the club ace instead of the diamond ace, he should return the two of hearts when he gave his partner the ruff.

A second very important use of the suit preference signal occurs when the contract is one of three notrump. The following example illustrates the value of the suit preference signal.

**North**  
98x  
Qx  
KQJxxx  
Jx

Bidding: S W N E  
1N P 3N P  
P P

**West**  
Q10732  
A96  
862  
93

**East**  
A4  
108542  
A  
108542

Contract: 3NT

**South**  
KJ6  
KJ7  
1097  
AKQ7

Opening Lead: Spade 3

Play of the Hand:

Against three notrump, West leads the spade three (his fourth best spade). East wins the ace and returns the four. South puts in the jack which loses to the queen. At this point, West can knock out declarer's king with any one of his three remaining spades: the 10, the seven, or the two. He should select the 10, his highest spade, so that when East wins his ace of diamonds he will know to return a heart, the HIGHER RANKING of the two possible suits where West could hold an entry.

Note: Without the suit-preference signal, East would face a complete guess as to whether to return a club or a heart. Thanks to the suit preference signal, East returns a heart and the contract goes down two tricks.

---

A third common use of the suit preference signal occurs when the opening lead reveals a singleton in the suit your partner has led. The size of the card you play often will "tell" your partner which suit to lead. Let's look at the following three examples.

Example 1.       North  
                  KJ973  
                  Q  
                  QJ1042  
                  KQ

East

-----  
J1052  
853  
J7642

South is playing in a 6D contract. Your partner leads the ace of hearts. Which card do you play? The jack of hearts. You hope your partner will “read” it as a suit preference signal for a spade shift at trick two. The rest is history if she does!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Example 2.       North  
                  KJ107  
                  K532  
                  KJ107  
                  7

East

9753  
6  
AQ62  
Q1083

Contract: 4H

Opening Lead: K of clubs

Play of the hand:

South is playing in a 4H contract. Partner leads the king of clubs. Which card should you play? The three of clubs which is suit preference for a diamond shift.

Example 3.      North  
                  Kxx  
                  K10xx  
                  KQJx  
                  Kx

                  East  
                  Ax  
                  AJxx  
                  752  
                  xxxx

South is playing in a four-spade contract. Your partner leads the ace of diamonds. Dummy is tabled showing that the KQJ of diamonds are established for possible declarer discards. Play the seven of diamonds asking for a heart shift. Your hope is that your partner will “read” it as a suit preference signal asking for a heart shift at trick two.

## Practice Exercise

North  
97  
KQ7  
AKQ1042  
82

West  
AK85  
53  
975  
AQJ3

East  
QJ43  
6  
863  
109654

Bidding:    S    W    N    E  
              3H   X  4H   P  
              P    P

Opening Lead: King of spades

South  
1062  
AJ109842  
J  
K7

### Analysis of the Hand:

South is declarer at four hearts. West leads the king of spades. Partner plays the queen of spades which guarantees the jack (see Equal Honor Signal – February 22, 2021 lesson) or that he can ruff. West should underlead his ace of spades by playing the five of spades. The low spade is a SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL telling partner that he wants a club shift. Any other line of play gives the contract to declarer.

## Card Combinations

Hand 1.     A93

              QJ4

In this combination, you can never win more than two tricks. If you need two tricks in a hurry, and cannot afford to let the opponents in the lead, it is proper to lead the queen hoping that West holds the king. NOTE: the lead of the queen can take a trick because you “retain” the equivalent of the card you led.

Hand 2.     A93

              Q53

The only way to take two tricks with this holding is to play the ace and lead toward the queen. NOTE: the lead of the queen will never win. Here, unlike in Hand 1, you do not “retain” the equivalent of the card led.

Hand 3.     Q109

              542

Your object is to win one trick in the suit. If West holds both the ace and king, you will be successful. However, it is most improbable that this is the case. The proper way to play this combination is to lead a small card and insert the 10. Your hope is that it will drive out the ace or king. When you get back in the lead, repeat the lead toward the Q-9. West is known to hold the jack.

-----

## Pop Quiz

The following hand was taken from Dorothy Hayden Truscott's book, Bid Better, Play Better.

	North	
	QJ53	
	A984	
	85	
	842	
West		East
AK72		?
6		
9762		
AJ102		
	South	
	?	

South is in a three heart contract. West leads the spade king. East drops the nine. West continues with the ace and East plays the four. Which card should West next lead when he gives a ruff?

Answer: The two of spades, a suit preference signal. When East ruffs the third spade, he should return a club, the lower ranking of the other two suits—diamonds and clubs.

-----

Next Week:        Third Hand Play