

None Left Partner?

Last month we talked a bit about attitude signals when you are defending the deal. This month we'll turn our attention to one of the suit preference signals: your first discard, which happens at most once on each deal.

Declarer or your partner lead a suit and you are fresh out. Assuming you can't (or don't want to) ruff the trick, you will have to come up with a discard, which is the perfect opportunity for you to tell partner something about your hand. It's not a private message; declarer can listen in.

At the same time partner is saying something like, "None left, partner?" to verify that you haven't accidentally revoked, she should be carefully considering what you are trying to tell her with your discard.

Let's look at an example. In a team game, the bidding went 1♠-4♠.

bidding you've ever witnessed, but nonetheless, they are in game and you need to defeat it.

Partner's opening lead is the ♠A, which she follows with the ♠K. That's two tricks for the good guys and the contract is yours if you can get partner to switch to a heart (assuming declarer has at least two.)

If partner switches to a diamond, you anticipate declarer will pitch any losers he has in hand under good clubs. How, besides thumping on your chest, can you tell partner HEARTS, not diamonds?



It should come as no surprise at this point that the card you play on the second spade lead should point your partner in the right direction—but you and your partner must agree on what your discard means.

Often when I ask people what their carding is, they say that it's standard. What does **standard carding** mean when it comes to first discard?



Jim Jackson

Similar to standard attitude signals when your partner is on lead, discarding a high card signals your partner to lead the suit of your discard. When you can make a high standard discard, this is a great choice. It is usually quite clear and partner gets the message.

It can also be dramatic. Let's say you are playing in a suit contract with hearts as trump. Dummy has two spades, extra hearts to make ruffs and your holding is ♠AKQx. Discard the ♠A. I guarantee (well, almost guarantee) partner will notice and lead a spade if she gets on lead.

Choose the clearest signal possible.

Of course, sometimes you cannot afford to discard a high card to show your preference. In that situation, you must discard a low card from a suit you prefer not be led. Partner then must consider dummy, recall the bidding and the prior card play and determine which of the other two suits you want led.

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N-S Vul	♠ 9 7 5 2
South Deals	♥ 6 5
	♦ 6 5
	♣ A K Q J 10
Opening Lead	♠ 6
♠A	♥ A K 10 2
	♦ 9 8 3 2
	♣ 9 8 3 2

N	E
W	S

Example 1

When dummy comes down, you realize it was not the most scientific

Giving Off Some Attitude

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Usually this is not difficult for partner to figure out. However, sometimes none of your available discards can give partner the picture you want.

Back to the deal in question. Play the ♥10. Partner gets the hint and shoots a heart your way and you cash your two hearts before declarer claims.

But wait. Partner would never lead clubs, would she? Since the ♥10 might be worth something late in the hand. Maybe discarding the ♦2 and letting partner figure out to lead hearts is the better play.

What if partner's hand is something like this:

♠A K 3 ♥8 7 4 3 ♦K Q J 10 ♣5 4

(Let's ignore that after leading the ♠A, partner should probably immediately switch to a diamond.) Your partner will interpret your ♦2 discard as verification that you don't have the ♦A, but she still might try to set up a second diamond trick by leading a diamond rather than the heart you really want.

The problem with communication is the illusion that it has occurred.

~ George Bernard Shaw

Don't risk miscommunication when you have a clear messenger with the ♥10.

In example 2 the opponents are still in the 4♠ contract, but the heart situation has changed. You still want partner to lead a heart, but cannot afford to use the ♥Q as a discard signal. What to do?

N-S Vul	♠ 9 7 5 2
South Deals	♥ K 5
	♦ 6 5
	♣ A K Q J 10
Opening Lead	
♠A	
	♠ 6
	♥ A Q 3 2
	♦ 9 8 3 2
	♣ 9 8 3 2

Example 2

The highest heart you can afford to discard is the ♥3—which is going to look like a low card to partner. You have no choice but to discard the ♦2 and trust partner to lead a heart.

Some other first discard systems

Problems like the second one have led partnerships to explore other first discard systems. I want to say three things before I describe some of the other methods: 1) Any agreement is better than none. 2) There is no "best" method. 3) Using each of the methods, I've had hands in which I didn't have a good discard. That's bridge.

Upside down: The problem with "big I like, low I don't like" is that sometimes you have to give away a good card to give a clear signal. At notrump, even a deuce can be a trick-taking card.

Upside down turns the meanings on their head. A small discard shows a preference for that suit and a large discard shows disinterest. In both examples, the ♥2 would be the signal of choice for the upside down proponents.

Lavinthal: The discard is from a suit you do not like. If the discard is a small card, you prefer the lower ranked of the other two suits. A high discard points to the higher of the other two suits. In both examples either the ♦9 or ♣9 would signal hearts. I'd prefer to use the ♦9 to be clear that I didn't want diamonds.

Odd/Even: An odd discard means you like that suit. An even discard means not that suit; and as with Lavinthal, the size of the even card points to the higher or lower of the other suit.

In the first example I'd use the ♦8 to say not diamonds and point to hearts, the higher of the other two suits. In the second example, the ♥3 makes your preference clear.

Positive preference: A first discard, regardless of size, says "I like this suit."

Negative preference: A discard simply says, "not this suit." Unlike Lavinthal and Odd/Even it does not point partner to which of the other suits you do want.

Jim's Preferences:

Currently I use upside down for suit contracts and negative preference for notrump. In both cases I'm pitching cards that won't take tricks.