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A series on simple length-showing signals to shut out dummy; ACOL version

VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ T8652
♥ T94
♦ 843
♣ K7

West
♠ Q94
♥ AKQ6
♦ 75
♣ AJ64

East
♠ AJ
♥ 853
♦ KQJT9
♣ 952

South
♠ K73
♥ J72
♦ A62
♣ QT83

This series (and its companion piece to be found elsewhere in this edition) is all about how to isolate declarer from the dummy. To co-operate effectively the defenders need to be able to count the critical suit (usually dummy's long suit) and to do that they have to signal their *suit lengths* to each other.

How can they do that? Well, the conventional method is for a defender to follow upwards (starting with a small card) with an odd number of cards and to play high-low (also known as *petering*) with an even number of cards, allowing his partner to read the suit lengths. Clear? Well, maybe some example deals will help...

Hands 1 and 2 show how the defenders can co-operate effectively in deals that are similar-but-different.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	P
1♥	P	2♦	P
2NT	P	3♥	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 5

West reaches 3NT after a revealing bidding sequence and a useful looking Diamond suit appears on the table after North's ♠5 lead.

Declarer tries the Spade finesse at trick one and is disappointed when you take the ♠K to return partner's suit. This Spade return removes declarer's entry to his Diamonds. When declarer leads the ♦K at trick three how should you defend?

It would be weak defence to play the ♦A and fire back a Spade, hoping partner started with ♠Q × × × ×. Even if he has that holding you can afford to duck a round or two of Diamonds just to make sure that declarer and dummy are disconnected. The acid question is this: *Just how many Diamonds should you duck*?

On this layout declarer has an easy ride if you decline to play your ♦A on the first two rounds of the suit. Having sneaked a couple of tricks in Diamonds West can then take four Hearts (with the 3-3 break) and a Club, making nine tricks via two Spades, four Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club. Oops!

The successful defence is to duck one Diamond and to take the second round. Now dummy is as dead as a doornail and declarer can make no more than eight tricks.

How can you tell? If declarer held three Diamonds (and partner held two) then the right defence would be to duck two rounds of Diamonds, not just one.

The solution comes from watching partner's cards. When he plays the ♦3 on the first trick he is known to have an odd number of Diamonds (or to be fast asleep…). If North only has one Diamond then there is nothing you can do (declarer has four and you cannot disconnect the East-West hands). If partner has three Diamonds, though, declarer only has two and you must take the second round of the suit.

A Spade return after the ♦A gives declarer no chance worth mentioning.

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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
1♣	P	1♦	P
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ 5

North
♠ T8652
♥ T964
♦ 87
♣ K7

West
♠ Q94
♥ AKQ
♦ 643
♣ AJ64

East
♠ AJ
♥ 853
♦ KQJT9
♣ 952

South
♠ K73
♥ J72
♦ A52
♣ QT83

This deal is another VuBridge special. The dummy appears eerily similar to the previous deal and declarer is known to have a similar sort of hand. How can this be?

However, does this mean that the play and – especially – the defence must follow the same path? What do you think?

West reaches 3NT fairly quickly and a useful looking Diamond suit is exposed after North's Spade lead.

Declarer tries the Spade finesse at trick one and is disappointed when you take the ♠K to return partner's suit. This Spade return removes declarer's entry to the lovely Diamond suit on table. When declarer leads the ♦K at trick three how should you defend?

As in Hand 1, it would be poor defence to play the ♦A and fire back a Spade, hoping partner has ♠Q × × × ×. Even if he has that holding you can afford to duck a round or two of Diamonds just to make sure that declarer and dummy are disconnected. Again, the key question is this: *Just how many Diamonds should you duck*?

On this layout declarer has an easy time if you take the ♦A on the first or second round. This time the successful defence is to duck *two* rounds of Diamonds to isolate the dummy.

Again, North is the critical player here. On the first round of Diamonds (which you simply have to duck) North follows with the ♦8. Now, given that you can see all of the ♦A K Q J 10 9, this can only be the higher card from a doubleton or a singleton. (North can't have four Diamonds – think of the bidding!)

If North only has one Diamond then there is nothing you can do (declarer has four and you cannot disconnect the East-West hands). If partner has two Diamonds, though, declarer has three and you can isolate the Diamond suit by declining to play the ♦A until the third round.

Frustrated by failing to dislodge the ♦A in two rounds West turns his attention to Clubs, hoping for a 3-3 break there. No luck – eventually your side makes three tricks in the suit and 3NT fails.

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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North
- ♠ Q4
- ♥ J9872
- ♦ 76
- ♣ QJT4

West
- ♠ AK53
- ♥ AK43
- ♦ K83
- ♣ AK

East
- ♠ 962
- ♥ 65
- ♦ QJ952
- ♣ 875

South
- ♠ JT87
- ♥ QT
- ♦ AT4
- ♣ 9632

This hand is along the lines of whom do you trust when defending – partner or declarer?

That's not difficult is it...?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
2♣	P	2♦	P
2NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 7

West reaches 3NT having opened 2♣ and subsequently shown 23-24 points and dummy appears with a decent suit but little else. These deals with strong hands facing rubbish can be awkward to manage because of the lack of entries to the table. This example is no exception.

Partner leads the fourth-highest of his longest and strongest (the ♥7) and declarer realises that he has to make something of the Diamonds.

All will be well (from West's perspective) if he can force out the ♦A on the first or second round. So, West takes the ♥K and advances the ♦K followed by the ♦8, trying to look like a man with ♦K 8 alone. However, you shouldn't trust declarer (one little bit); it is partner you should trust.

Here North *peters* in Diamonds by playing the ♦7 before the ♦6 to show an even number. A quick count confirms that can only be from a doubleton so you allow the second round of Diamonds to win. With dummy's cards now waste paper declarer has to hope for a 3-3 Spade break for his ninth trick.

Nope – it just isn't his lucky day…

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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

North
- ♠ AQ3
- ♥ J98732
- ♦ 876
- ♣ T

West
- ♠ K54
- ♥ AK4
- ♦ K3
- ♣ AKQJ4

East
- ♠ 962
- ♥ 65
- ♦ QJ952
- ♣ 875

South
- ♠ JT87
- ♥ QT
- ♦ AT4
- ♣ 9632

A very similar deal to the last one (!)

Odd how these things keep happening in VuBridge, isn't it? Is it *déjà vu* all over again?

However, you must keep focus. Does partner's carding tell you to do the same thing as last time or do something different?

West	North	East	South
2♣	P	2♦	P
2NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 7

In similar vein to Hand 3 West reaches 3NT having shown a strong hand (23-24 points) and dummy appears with Diamonds but little else. Dummy wasn't quite what West wanted although you should note that the ♣10 would have been a pearl beyond price and made 3NT almost bomb-proof.

Partner leads the fourth-highest of his longest and strongest (the ♥7) and declarer realises that he has to set up some Diamond tricks. On this deal (by contrast with Hand 3) declarer needs either that the ♦A be taken on the first round of the suit or that the defence duck two rounds of Diamonds. Often enough on deals like this the defenders do duck two rounds of Diamonds "just to be on the safe side". Now declarer would have enough tricks for 3NT with five Clubs, two Hearts and two Diamonds.

Anyway, declarer takes the ♥K and advances the ♦K. Naturally, you duck that and watch partner's cards carefully. When partner plays his Diamonds upwards you know that he has three cards there (by playing upwards North is showing an odd number – this can only be from a three-card suit) so you take the ♦A on the **second** round and return partner's Heart suit.

Declarer forlornly cashes his five Clubs and concedes the last four tricks for one down.

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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ JT642
♥ T964
♦ 32
♣ K6

West
♠ AQ3
♥ AKQ
♦ 874
♣ A853

East
♠ 975
♥ 75
♦ KQT65
♣ Q92

South
♠ K8
♥ J832
♦ AJ9
♣ JT74

On this deal it is very difficult to read the layout of the Diamond suit.

How important is it to read partner's card?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	P
1♣	P	1♦	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 4

West reaches 3NT having shown a strong hand and North kicks off with the fourth-highest of his longest-and-strongest, the ♠4.

West carefully allows your ♠K to win trick one and takes the second round of Spades. Diamonds is the obvious suit to attack so declarer leads up to the ♦K, hoping for a friendly layout of the suit. To spread as much confusion as he can he leads the ♦8, making your job of reading partner's ♦3 as difficult as possible. What is this ♦3 from? It could be the lowest of three cards (declarer holding ♦8 2) or it could be the higher of two (from precisely ♦3 2 doubleton).

However, this is one of these cases where the count doesn't really matter. When you hold the A J × over the top of dummy's K Q × it is almost always right to duck the Queen, to preserve the A J as a *major tenace* over the King. Whatever the Diamond layout this is likely to prove to be a major nuisance for declarer – especially if you make the play smoothly and give nothing away.

Here, declarer comes back to hand with a Heart and tries his luck again by leading another Diamond. Now you take the ♦A over the ♦Q and switch back to Hearts, eventually setting up a trick in the suit. West loses two Diamonds, a Heart, a Spade and a Club for one down. Had you taken the ♦A on the first round declarer could have made his contract without any trouble.

How? – That will be left as an exercise for the reader.

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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ Q84
♥ A3
♦ 753
♣ KQJT6

West
♠ A96
♥ J9652
♦ T2
♣ 843

East
♠ KT52
♥ K74
♦ 964
♣ A95

South
♠ J73
♥ QT8
♦ AKQJ8
♣ 72

For this last deal of this series we are going to sit you in declarer's chair.

Why do that, when this is a session on defence? Ah! There is method amongst the madness – trust us!

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 5

You play in 3NT after a straightforward bidding sequence and West makes a nuisance of himself by leading a Heart.

Although this guarantees two Heart tricks for your side (you play low from dummy at trick one, of course) it runs the risk of the ♥A being dislodged prematurely from the table. Sure enough, East wins the ♥K at once and promptly returns a Heart, taking away the entry to those lovely Clubs. Now what?

A count of tricks shows that you have two Hearts and five Diamonds. You can set up at least three Club winners but how can you reach them? It would be easy enough if the ♣A were to appear on the first round but these opponents didn't learn the game just yesterday.

Well, you just have to play on Clubs so you lead the ♣K, which holds (naturally – no rational defender is going to win the ♣A too early!) However, what Club did you play from hand? The ♣7, of course! You must conceal the ♣2 and hope this scrambles the opponents' signals.

When you imperturbably lead the ♣Q at the next trick East has a real problem. Was his partner's ♣3 the start of a *peter* from ♣3 2 or was it the lowest card from three low Clubs? Unable to determine the true position, and unwilling to allow you access to all those Clubs, East plays low and you have stolen your ninth trick. Having pinched the second Club trick you can grab five Diamonds and the ♥Q before conceding the last three tricks.

Was East to blame for ducking the second Club? Not really. If your low Diamond had been a low Club and West really did have ♣3 2 doubleton his defence would have been right.