



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

VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/09/2014	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♦ J

Here 3NT is played by West on the ♦J lead from North.

Declarer wins trick one with the ♦A (a poorly judged false card as you know the location of the ♦Q from the opening lead) and can count seven top tricks in the red suits.

There are two "slow" Club tricks if declarer can get at them so West immediately leads the ♣Q. North has no reason at all to take that with his Ace so he ducks, playing the ♣6, and you, as South, should equally be in no hurry to part with the ♣K.

Work it out. If either North or South takes the first Club the hand is easy-peasy, lemon squeezy. Declarer wins the Diamond return in hand with the ♦Q, plays the ♣9 and overtakes it in the dummy. This way he cannot be prevented from setting up two Clubs and reaching them with the ♦K.

If, however, the ♣Q is ducked by both defenders there are insufficient entries to get the Clubs going and declarer has nowhere to go for nine tricks. If he plays on Spades (a classical *frozen suit*) he must lose three tricks there.

North
 ♠ AT6
 ♥ T82
 ♦ JT98
 ♣ A76

West
 ♠ Q752
 ♥ AKQJ
 ♦ AQ6
 ♣ Q9



East
 ♠ J83
 ♥ 753
 ♦ K52
 ♣ JT84

South
 ♠ K94
 ♥ 964
 ♦ 743
 ♣ K532

This series (and the previous series on this topic 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.

What is the normal method for these signals? Well, the conventional procedure is for a defender to follow upwards (starting with a small card) with an odd number of cards and to play high-low with an even number of cards, allowing his partner to read the suit lengths.

The first series showed some basic examples of this idea. This series is trickier and may have you scratching your heads... Here you are going to see six examples of good hands facing weak ones, a common position where the defenders' best play is to break communications between dummy and declarer.


Hand 1. Can you read what is going on in both the suit that partner leads and in the suit declarer attacks?



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Date: 07/09/2014	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ JT985		
	♥ 765		
	♦ T9		
	♣ 532		
West		East	
♠ Q763		♠ K4	
♥ QT		♥ J9842	
♦ AQJ6		♦ 542	
♣ KQJ		♣ AT6	
	South		
	♠ A2		
	♥ AK3		
	♦ K873		
	♣ 9874		

Can you piece together who has what high cards on this deal?

Having done that, can you find an effective defense?

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

Lead: ♠ J

After you open 1♦ West eventually plays in 3NT. North, with nothing much to guide him, leads the ♠J and declarer faces an interesting play problem.

Superficially, West can see one Spade, three Hearts, at least two Diamonds and three Clubs for his contract (you are marked with all the missing high cards after the bidding). However, can declarer get to them all?

Declarer plays the ♠K from dummy (won by your ♠A) and takes the ♠Q at trick two. Note that your ♠2 return is a little revealing as it suggests that Spades are 5-2 – with two remaining Spades you'd lead the higher card back.

Declarer now advances the ♥Q and the fate of the hand depends on this trick. Take it and West makes his contract easily. Duck it (and North's carding shows you he has three Hearts, leaving West with two) and declarer has to go off.


If you take the ♥K and play back a minor card (a Club is best) West can win that in hand and overtake the ♥10 with the ♥J on table. He is certain to get Hearts going now for three tricks. However... should you allow the ♥Q to win what can declarer do next? Another Heart is won by the ♥K but now West lacks the entries to set up and enjoy the long suit. He will end up with one Heart trick only.

It now takes brilliant play from declarer to get out for one down...



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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/09/2014	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ Q63	
	♥ 9754	
	♦ A84	
	♣ J42	
West		East
♠ 842		♠ AK5
♥ J63		♥ QT8
♦ KJT9		♦ Q5
♣ 863		♣ AKQT5
	South	
	♠ JT97	
	♥ AK2	
	♦ 7632	
	♣ 97	

Here is another good hand facing a weak dummy.

Can you tell partner what to do in time?

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

Lead: ♠ J

East reaches 3NT having shown 20-21 points and dummy has a miserable hand. You, sitting South, have an obvious ♠J lead but you cannot be sure of the Spade layout when partner plays the ♠6 and declarer wins the ♠K.

Declarer starts on Diamonds by leading the ♦Q and you must make a clear signal to partner, who may have ♦A × ×. (In passing it's worth noting that if partner has ♦A × and declarer ♦Q × × then the defense is without hope as partner cannot isolate the Diamonds on the table).

Now, which Diamond should you play? The ♦3, intending to play the ♦2 on the next round? Ah, but what happens if declarer puts the ♦K on the ♦Q and leads the ♦J? Now partner is in agonies of indecision as he can't judge whether your ♦3 is the start of a *high-low* or the lowest card from three. Probably he will duck a second Diamond and declarer will have a second Diamond trick.

Note that two Diamond tricks is all that East needs to make 3NT. He has two Spades and five Clubs (with the 3-2 break) so just two Diamond tricks would do very nicely, thank you.

Now, when you are making a length signal with four low cards it is almost always right to signal with the **second-highest card**. Why? Because it is very hard for partner to misread it. The ♦6 is the right card to play on the ♦Q as your length-showing signal.

Here, when partner reads you for four Diamonds and takes the ♦A on the second round declarer is dead and buried – 3NT has no chance.



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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/09/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

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

Lead: ♠ J

You may not have realized it but this hand is Hand 3 rotated through 180°. Here you have to decide how many Diamonds to duck as South against 3NT after East-West have bid 2NT – 3NT.

Partner leads the ♠J and you do the best you can to signal encouragement with the ♠6 (this, you should note, is not a *length-showing* position). Declarer takes the ♠K and plays the ♦Q to the ♦K and tries the ♦J, forcing you to make a decision before you have seen your partner's second card.

Well? Win or duck? Let's analyze partner's ♦6 on the first round. Can North have three Diamonds? **No**, because the ♦6 cannot be the lowest of three cards (you can see all of the ♦A K Q J 10 9 8 so there aren't two Diamonds higher than the ♦6 that partner can hold).

So the ♦6 is the start of a *high-low* and North has an even number – either two or four. If partner has two Diamonds declarer has four and we are wasting our time – no defense works as West has three Diamond tricks regardless.

If partner has four Diamonds, though, declarer has two and we must take the second Diamond with the ♦A.

Having done so, we make the routine play of returning partner's Spade suit and let nature take its course. As it happens, 3NT simply runs out of steam and fails by one trick.

North
♠ JT97
♥ AK2
♦ 7632
♣ 97

West
♠ AK5
♥ QT8
♦ Q5
♣ AKQT5



East
♠ 842
♥ J63
♦ KJT9
♣ 863

South
♠ Q63
♥ 9754
♦ A84
♣ J42

On this hand you have little information on which to make a critical decision in the defense.

Can you make best use of the one card partner has played?



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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/09/2014	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ QT7	
	♥ JT987	
	♦ 32	
	♣ J96	
West		East
♠ AJ8		♠ 642
♥ AKQ		♥ 653
♦ Q54		♦ KJT96
♣ AK42		♣ 73
	South	
	♠ K953	
	♥ 42	
	♦ A87	
	♣ QT85	

These last two hands feature tricky defenses.

You need to keep your wits about you and look very carefully at the spot cards.

Can you work out what the distribution of a critical suit is from very little evidence?

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

Lead: ♥ J

West plays in 3NT and your partner leads the ♥J. West has to make tricks from the Diamond suit so plays one at trick two.

Now, the hand would easy to defend should declarer lead the ♦Q and follow with either of his Diamonds at trick two. Sitting South you'd be able to see both of your partner's Diamond cards in good time and see whether North played *high-low* or not.

Here you'd see partner play the ♦3 followed by the ♦2 and you'd know that he had two (and West had three). With that in mind you would duck two rounds of Diamonds and West would fail in his contract, restricted to one Spade, three Hearts, **two** Diamonds and two Clubs.

However... here, West decides, on a whim, to play Diamonds differently. For no real reason he leads a low Diamond (the ♦4) to the ♦9 and then leads the ♦K. (If you take the ♦A West fully intends to pitch the ♦Q). You now have to decide what to do after you have only seen one card from partner (the ♦3). Should you duck the ♦K or should you take it?

You cannot immediately read the Diamond suit – the ♦3 could be the start of a high-low from a doubleton (specifically the ♦3 2) or it could be the lowest card from three. At this point you have to realize that the ♦2 is missing. If declarer has it (with his ♦Q) then partner has a singleton Diamond. (**Why?** Because otherwise East has ♦Q 4 2 and North has played the ♦3 from ♦5 3. Not possible, unless he is asleep at the wheel. So West has ♦Q 5 4 2). If North has it then he must have precisely two Diamonds (the ♦3 2) and hence West has three.

In this case it is right to duck the Diamond.



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VB#20 Year 2 Length-showing signals Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/09/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

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

Lead: S

East reaches 3NT and you, as South, lead the obvious ♠J. It is not so easy to see what is going on in Spades when North follows with the ♠7 and East takes the ♠A. Still, the ♠7 does look encouraging.

Anyway, once again, as in Hand 5, you have to read the layout of dummy's long suit with very little information.

East would make the hand easy for you if he were to lead a low Club to the ♣10 and then lead a low one back to the ♣Q. Should he do that you'd have an armchair ride in the defense –you would see North make a high-low signal in Clubs (the ♣4 followed by the ♣3) and you would easily deduce that North had two Clubs and East had three. On that basis you would know to hold up the ♣A until the third round. Simple.

However... this East, for no reason other than it seemed like a good idea to him at the time, decides to lead the ♣Q from hand at trick two and follows it with the ♣8. You have only seen one Club from North (the ♣4) so have to make a decision under pressure. It could be wrong to duck again (if East had ♣Q 8 alone); it could be wrong to take the ♣A.

How can you tell?

The \$64000 question is: **Where is the missing ♣2?** (You might equally well ask **Where is the ♣3?**)

If North has either of them then he is playing high-low. In that case he has two Clubs only and you must hold up the ♣A.

If East has one of the missing baby Clubs then he has three Clubs. The conclusion is that (again) you must withhold the Ace. QED.

Declarer has simply no suit in his hand that will yield an extra trick and 3NT must fail.

North
♠ Q75
♥ J732
♦ QT82
♣ 43

West
♠ 63
♥ 986
♦ 654
♣ KJT76



East
♠ AK42
♥ AK5
♦ AK7
♣ Q82

South
♠ JT98
♥ QT4
♦ J93
♣ A95

In similar vein to Hand 5 you have to make an important early decision on this deal with a minimum of information.

What should you do and why?