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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 2	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 1
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: None
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ 873	
	♥	
	♦ AKJT53	
	♣ QJ63	
West		East
♠ AKT52		♠ J964
♥ K85		♥ AQT3
♦ Q74		♦ 862
♣ AK		♣ 52
	South	
	♠ Q	
	♥ J97642	
	♦ 9	
	♣ T9874	

The two series of six deals in this edition of V-Blue (this one and the first of the two series to be found elsewhere) are on signalling in defence.

The topic here is "Suit Preference" signalling and the way we can use them in ruffing situations.

Everything, remember, revolves around the connection between the ranking of the suits (Spades-Hearts-Diamonds-Clubs in that order) and the rank of the card you lead when giving a ruff (is it a high card or a low card?) The higher the card, the more it is tied to the higher ranking suit.

In practice there are only two suits to choose from so all you have to do is to decide whether partner has led a high card or a low card.

These six deals expand on the principles expounded in the first series.

Hand 1. Partner's signal is clear. However, surely you have a nice, safe lead at trick four...?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
1♠	2♦	2♣	P
4♠	P	P	P

Lead: ♦ A

You are sitting here with a heap of rubbish – shapely rubbish to be sure but still a heap. West opens 1♠ in third seat, partner's 2♦ overcall does not inspire you with great hope and East raises to 2♣. West goes on to game and no one has anything more to say.

North starts off with the ♦A and you are grateful that your singleton Diamond is the ♦9 as it acts as a "come-on" signal to partner.

North takes the ♦K and plays the ♦J which you trump with the ♠Q; that's good, you have three tricks in the bag already so just need one more to defeat 4♣. The ♣10 is the obvious lead at trick four (*through* declarer and round to the weakness on the table). What could be wrong with that?

What is wrong with leading the ♣10 is that it takes no account of partner's carding. Why lead the ♦J for you to ruff? North could have led any of his remaining Diamonds – why play the highest? A high card calls for the higher of the remaining suits – and that's Hearts in this case.

So North is asking (insisting, demanding) that you lead a Heart. Why do that, with the ♥A Q 10 3 on the table? Well, *ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die*. A Heart lead sees partner score the fourth (and final) defensive trick with a ruff and we realise that our trust in him is fully justified.


One down.



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 2	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ 8764	
	♥ 763	
	♦ 4	
	♣ KJ653	
West		East
♠ KQ9		♠ JT532
♥ Q42		♥ AK5
♦ KJT87		♦ AQ9
♣ Q8		♣ 42
	South	
	♠ A	
	♥ JT98	
	♦ 6532	
	♣ AT97	

This hand is not *quite* the same as the others.

What are you going to lead against an opponent's game contract?

Why?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	P
2♦	P	3♦	P
4♠	P	P	P

Lead: ♦ 2

East-West start off 1♠ – 2♦ and East has a small rebid problem. He decides that a raise to 3♦ is a better effort than a rebid of 2♠ with such a tatty Spade suit and we can't really blame him for that. West's leap to 4♠ is justified as it's now obvious East has five of them. This bid concludes the auction.

Now, what do you lead as South? The ♥J may leap out of your hand – after all, we have stressed the value of leading sequences in VuBridge. However, you should always strain to listen in on the opponents' conversations. It appears that they have a Diamond fit, probably of eight cards, possibly of nine cards. If that were the case then partner would have a Diamond shortage and we can give him Diamond ruffs.

So we should lead a Diamond to set up some defensive ruffs and we can start the suit-preference process by leading the ♦2. Of course, that isn't the normal card to lead from such a holding (we'd normally lead the ♦5 as a "second-highest-from-rubbish" lead) but this is not a normal situation. We are not asking partner to lead back a Diamond (or **not** lead back a Diamond – the usual rationale for leading second best rather than fourth-best); quite the contrary. We are hoping he has no Diamonds at all to lead back...


Declarer takes the Diamond lead and, having no inkling of the firestorm about to engulf him, innocently plays a trump. We take the Ace, perform, and play another Diamond – the ♦3 to reinforce the suit-preference message. Partner, as expected, ruffs this and, taking heed of the fact that we are leading low Diamonds, plays a Club. We take the ♣A and play yet another Diamond. Partner ruffs this and cashes the ♣K and declarer, shaking his head, is two down.

There is nothing East could have done to prevent defeat although it's worth pointing out that 4♠ would have made on a "routine" Heart lead.



Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 4H By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ 9762	
	♥ 9642	
	♦ A	
	♣ 9854	
West		East
♠ T4		♠ Q83
♥ AKQJT83		♥ 7
♦ 63		♦ KQJ9852
♣ AQ		♣ 63
	South	
	♠ AKJ5	
	♥ 5	
	♦ T74	
	♣ KJT72	

We are going to get some exciting auctions from this point on.

On this deal you have to ask, "what is partner doing?"

Can we suggest to him how to defend this one?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♣
4♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♦ A

The bidding is over rapidly here. You open 1♣ and West's jump to 4♥ ends the auction.

Partner, somewhat unexpectedly, leads the ♦A and you contemplate the dummy. What is going on and how are you going to beat this one?

Now, speculative leads from ♦A × are not to be encouraged and are low percentage shots; here it is more likely that partner has led the ♦A because it's a singleton. If that is the case it's important that partner switches to a Spade at trick two and not a Club. How can North tell? Remember – you did open 1♣.

The solution is to follow to the first trick with the ♦10 rather than meekly follow suit with the "natural" ♦4. In almost all circumstances the first card you play at trick one – in response to partner's lead – is encourage/discourage. However, in this case, with a long suit in dummy headed by the ♦K Q J, how can you be encouraging partner to continue the suit – and with such vehemence, too?

Although suit-preference signals at trick one are rare they can be mightily effective. Partner just has to realise, by a simple glance at dummy, that you cannot be making an encouraging/discouraging signal.

If he gets the message here ("Please, please, play a Spade next and not a Club") then 4♥ goes down by two tricks. As defenders you take two Spades, a Diamond, a Diamond ruff and – eventually – a Club trick. If North, in all innocence, plays a Club at trick two declarer would make twelve (count them, **twelve**) tricks.

Here, we get it right as a partnership. Well defended, partner.



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 2	Contract: 4H
ACOL	By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

West	North	East	South
1♥	P	2♥	2♠
4♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 6

East-West bid to 4♥ after you have managed to enter the auction with 2♠. North dutifully leads a Spade (the ♠6) and you have to decide how to defend this one.

On your ♠Q at trick one West makes a mistake by false-carding with the wrong Spade. He thinks he is being cunning by dropping the ♠8 but that does not add up. If partner had ♠6 5 2 he'd have led the ♠5. Had West thrown the ♠5 at trick one it would have left open the possibility that North had led from ♠8 6 3.

Regardless of these musings there is little prospect of success if West has a singleton Spade so you try the ♠A at trick two. A little surprisingly, North shows out, meaning that the first three tricks could be yours. So what should you do at trick three?

Cash the ♠K and play another Spade, hoping North could over-ruff West, perhaps? Possible but not likely. Perhaps North has a Club trick or the ♦A? Well, again – possible but not likely. We have a sure-fire way of beating this one (on the assumption North has a trump), if we enlist partner's co-operation.

Instead of cashing the third Spade trick we play back the ♠2 at trick three, forcing partner to ruff. The ♠2 sends a clear suit-preference message that we want a Club lead next and that is what partner duly produces. When we ruff that a startled declarer is one down.

North

♠ 6  
♥ J  
♦ QJ972  
♣ J98632

West

♠ 853  
♥ AKQ964  
♦ A  
♣ KQT



East

♠ JT7  
♥ T853  
♦ K5  
♣ A754

South

♠ AKQ942  
♥ 72  
♦ T8643  
♣

Partner is dutiful here and leads your suit.


That's a good start to the defence – but can you see it through and beat the hand?



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 2	Contract: 5D
ACOL	By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: All
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ J876532	
	♥ 97	
	♦ K65	
	♣ 4	
West		East
♠ QT		♠ K94
♥ A		♥ 63
♦ AQJ9432		♦ T8
♣ 865		♣ AKQT73
	South	
	♠ A	
	♥ KQJT8542	
	♦ 7	
	♣ J92	

A rapid and high-level auction leaves you defending a contract with no real idea of who has what.

Can you **Read the Lead** and come up with a helpful and accurate defence?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♣	4♥
5♦	P	P	P

Lead: ♣ 4

The bidding is exciting and a little unexpected. After North has Passed and East has opened 1♣ you try the effect of bidding your eight-card suit at the four-level, reasonably confident that it will buy the auction. Not a bit of it. West emerges with an unexpected effort of 5♦ and that ends the bidding. Having made the opponents guess at the five-level it would be poor bridge by you to battle on further with 5♥.

Another piece of unexpected play comes with partner's lead. Expecting a Heart lead you see that partner has put the ♣4 on the table. What is going on?

The only reason we can surmise for North to lead dummy's suit is that he has a singleton Club. Note also that the ♣4 is the lowest Club partner can have. That proclaims an honour under normal circumstances but here he can't have one. This is conclusive evidence, Dr Watson, of North having led a singleton.

Well, if West has solid trumps he will simply draw trumps and run off dummy's Clubs. However, what if North gets on lead. What do we want him to do – and how can we tell him that?

When you ask the right questions it is easier to get the right answers. Here you should follow suit at trick one with the ♣J. This can't be an encouraging signal – what would be the point of encouraging partner with the ♣A K Q 10 on table? The only other possibility is that it is a **suit-preference signal** for Spades (the higher ranking of Hearts and Spades).

Here, the tactic works like a dream. Partner takes the ♦K at trick two as declarer finesses. Back comes a **Spade** (partner was paying attention to your signals!) and you give partner a Club ruff.


Declarer spreads his cards and claims for one off. A Heart switch from partner at trick three, you may note, would have made West's life easy.



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 2	Contract: 5D
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 6
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: All
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ KQJT8542	
	♥ A	
	♦ 7	
	♣ J92	
West		East
♠ 63		♠ A
♥ K93		♥ QT
♦ T8		♦ AQJ9432
♣ AKQT73		♣ 865
	South	
	♠ 97	
	♥ J876542	
	♦ K65	
	♣ 4	

Another high-level auction following a pre-emptive bid.

What do you lead? How might you follow up this defence?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
1♣	4♣	5♦	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ 4

Here you Pass as dealer (you weren't tempted into trying some sort of vulnerable pre-empt with this bucket of swill, were you?) and West opens 1♣. Partner startles you with a 4♣ overcall and East surprises you even more by bidding 5♦. That ends the auction and you have to find a lead.

Well, it might be normal to lead a Spade after partner has bid the suit at the four-level but a singleton Club lead here is more promising. You expect to get on lead with the ♦K and can hope to put partner on lead (with the ♠A?) and then you may receive a Club ruff. Sounds like a plan...

You lead a Club, taken on table with the ♠A as partner follows with the ♣2. Declarer runs the ♦10 into your hand and you take the ♦K. What now?

Well, the ♠9 is probably jumping out of your hand but if you trust your partner you should pick it up and ram it firmly back amongst its pals. North must know your Club is a singleton (why lead it otherwise?) so his first Club may be (make that "ought to be") a signal. True, he may be having a little doze (or surfing the internet on his smartphone) and be paying insufficient attention to the hand; in short he may just be following suit in Clubs, not thinking or caring about his play.

With a good partner (is there any other type here at VuBridge?) you can be confident that partner is signalling for a Heart. With the ♠A he would (could, indeed, **should**) have played his highest Club – and surely he has a Club higher than the ♣2!

So, with some trepidation to be sure, you play a Heart at trick three. To your delight partner takes the ♥A and gives you a Club ruff.

"Well defended!" you say. Was that a look of quiet satisfaction or of blank incomprehension? You choose.