

SIGNALS IN NO TRUMP by Maritha Pottenger

A general guideline is that **most signals when defending against no trump, are attitude when partner leads, count when Declarer or Dummy leads.** If you like the suit partner is leading, signal with the highest spot card you can afford. If you don't like it, play your lowest card. If you have a doubleton honor, **unblock** to get out of partner's way.

When **you are third hand** to play against a **No Trump contract** and dummy has small cards, you should signal as indicated below:

Partner leads Ace: unblock with an honor if you have one. If you do not, give count.

Partner leads King: Overtake with the doubleton Ace and return suit. Unblock with doubleton Jack. Signal encouragement with three or more to the Ace, Queen, or Jack. If you have doubleton Queen, play LOW. (Partner should have played Ace if s/he wanted you to unblock the queen. Partner is probably leading from AKxxx.) Play your lowest card (attitude—"I don't like it") if you have no honor.

Partner leads Queen: Overtake with King doubleton or Ace doubleton and return suit. Unblock with 10x. Signal encouragement with three or more to the Ace, King, or 10. Play your lowest card with no honor. If you have the jack, unblock it whether it is Jx or Jxx or Jxxx. Partner should be leading from KQ109(x)(x). If you think partner's lead is from KQ109(x) and you do not have the jack, give count.

Partner leads Jack. Overtake (and return suit) with King doubleton, Queen doubleton, or Ace doubleton. Signal encouragement with three or more to the Queen. If you are playing standard leads (where Jack could be from J109x or from AJ10x), play the King from any holding with the King, and return the suit. Ditto with three or more cards to the Ace—overtake & return suit. If you are playing "Jack denies," (where partner cannot have a higher honor), use your judgment with the Ace. It might be right to duck and it might be right to take the trick and immediately shift to another suit. Count Declarer's likely tricks to decide.

Partner leads Ten. If you play "jack denies," the 10 could be from AJ10x, KJ10x, or top of a sequence. If you are playing standard leads, the 10 could be from A109x, K109x, or Q109x or top of a sequence. Overtake with the Ace, the King, or the Queen. Play your lowest card (attitude) to deny an honor. If you are playing "jack denies" and you can see the jack, partner has led top of a sequence with ZERO higher cards. If you are playing standard leads and you can see the 9, assume [an unusual] "top of nothing."

Partner leads Nine: If you play standard leads, this is "top of nothing" and you will only want to encourage partner when you have something decent and want the suit continued. If you play "jack denies," this could be from A109, K109, Q109 or top of nothing. If you cannot see the 10 in dummy, and you are playing jack denies, assume partner has one of the strong combinations and play third-hand high. If you can see the 10, assume top of nothing.

Partner leads a spot card: Assume 4th-best. If 4th-best is impossible when you check the Rule of Eleven, assume "top of nothing" (if a fairly high spot card) or possibly 3rd-best from an honor (perhaps it was the only unbid suit and partner is hoping you have 4 or more cards in it). If Dummy takes partner's spot card lead with an Ace or King, signal attitude (high shows an honor). If dummy takes partner's spot card with a Queen or lower card, show count (attitude is now irrelevant). If the distribution of this suit is known because of the bidding, & dummy takes trick with Queen, signal encouragement when holding the Jack, otherwise low (discourage). If Dummy takes trick with Jack, signal high (encourage) with 10, otherwise low.

Continuations after you have led the top of an honor sequence. If you have 3 honors in sequence and the next spot card, skipping only one, after leading your top honor, continuing with the 3rd honor asks partner to play his/her highest card. For example, you lead King from KQJ98 and partner signals low and Declarer ducks. Lead the Jack next. If partner unloads the 10, you know it is safe to continue the suit. If partner does not have the 10, Declarer could have A10xx.

Remember, **suit preference against no trump occurs when you are knocking out Declarer's last stopper** (usually a bare Ace). The size of the card you play tells partner where your entry (or possible entry) is to get in and cash your length tricks. Suit preference also occurs when attitude AND count are known or irrelevant.