

SIGNALS BY DEFENDERS by Maritha Pottenger

There are a variety of systems in use for signaling partner with your discards. The most common system is the **standard system** in which discards show **attitude**: a **high discard says you like that suit** and would appreciate partner leading it. A **low discard says you do not like that suit**, and would prefer partner led some other suit. Generally, people **discard high cards against suit contracts** (because you may only be able to cash one or two tricks in that suit anyway and you may need to get the information to partner with a single discard. People tend to **discard low cards** (negative discards) when defending **no trump contracts** (because a high card might be a trick).

Some people play **upside-down signals** in terms of discards. For them, a **high card** says they **do not like** that suit. A **low card** says they **do like that suit**. (Most people who play upside-down attitude also play upside-down count.) Remember to check the convention cards of your opponents!

Some players use **Lavinthal** discards. These are named after Hy Lavinthal who originated the idea of suit-preference signal in 1934. **Lavinthal signals** never apply to the suit led and never apply to the trump suit. Thus, there are two suits to choose from. A **high card asks partner to switch to the higher-ranking of the two available suits**. A **low card asks partner to switch to the lower-ranking of the two available suits**. Everyone uses Lavinthal (suit-preference) signals when giving partner a ruff. (For example, spades are trumps and partner leads a heart that is known to be a singleton. You take the Ace. If you lead back the 2 of hearts—or any low heart, you ask partner to lead a club after he trumps your heart. If you lead back a high heart, you ask partner to lead a diamond after he trumps your heart.)

With **Lavinthal discards**, you **discard a suit you do not want partner to lead**. A **high card** says to **lead the higher-ranking** of the other suits. A **low card** says to **lead the lower-ranking** of the other suits. Generally, Lavinthal signals are used for the first discard only.

Another system of discards is **Odd-Even**. In that system, **odd cards are encouraging**. So, discarding a 3, 5, 7, or 9 encourages partner to lead that suit. **Low cards are discouraging and tend to be suit-preference**. Thus, if spades are trumps, and partner discards a 2 or 4 in diamonds, partner is probably asking for a club. If partner discards a 2 or 4 in clubs, partner is probably asking for a diamond. If partner discards an 8 or 10 of hearts, partner is probably asking for a diamond. If partner discards an 8 or 10 of diamonds, partner is probably asking for a heart. If partner discards an 8 or 10 of clubs, partner is probably asking for a heart. If partner discards a six, you will have to work out from your spot cards and dummy's spot cards whether that 6 is low (suit preference for lower of other two suits) or high (suit preference for higher of other two suits). Remember, the trump suit is excluded, so a discard in a suit other than trump leaves only two choices for the suit-preference signal. Generally, odd-even signals apply to the first discard only. After that, people tend to show current count.

Most defenders discard from length. A wise Declarer will watch your discards and make inferences. If you discard a low card from a suit in which dummy has 4 cards, Declarer should play you for an original holding of 5 cards. Even if dummy does not have 4 cards, assuming that the defender had 5 cards originally is a good hypothesis with which to start. When Declarer has a two-way finesse position (e.g., KJ10 in dummy), and you have 3 little cards, do not discard any! You might help Declarer guess the Queen. Part of **deceptive discarding** is to protect your partner! If you know partner might have a certain card, if possible, discard as if you had that card so Declarer cannot figure out what is going on!