

Ask Dwight for July 26, 2020 Newsletter

Hi Dwight,

I have a question about defense signals.

N/S were in 2NT this morning.

- West led a low spade to the J
- East played Ace spades then 9 spades to the K
- West then played Q of spades
- East discarded 3 of hearts

What does the discard mean?

I don't like the suit; I do like the suit; or is it a *Suit Preference Signal* for diamonds?

Can you only do a *Suit Preference Signal* when you are following suit?

Thanks, A

	N	W	N	E	S
6 ^D	♠ 65432 ♥ Q42 ♦ 5 ♣ J865	P	1♠	P	1♦ 2NT
V	♠ KQ87 ♥ J65 ♦ Q982 ♣ 104			E	♠ AJ9 ♥ A103 ♦ 743 ♣ Q972
	S				
	♠ 10 ♥ K987 ♦ AKJ106 ♣ AK3				2NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

Dwight's Response

Hi A,

Signaling in bridge while defending is extremely important. In general, there are 2 types of signals used. The most common is called standard signals as follows:

Playing/discarding a low card in any suit is discouraging while pitching a high card in a suit says you want partner to lead that suit.

In the case you presented, the pitch of a low heart should say NOT to lead hearts but rather another suit. If you review the auction you will almost always know what suit is wrong to lead (in this case, diamonds) and so the logical conclusion is to play the remaining (fourth) suit, in this case clubs. Note that on this hand partner cannot afford to pitch a high club to say they like clubs. Contrast that to a hand where partner held good long clubs such as KQ987. Then, they can afford to pitch the 9 of clubs to tell partner to switch to clubs rather than hearts.

In summary:

Discarding a low card in a suit discourages playing that suit while discarding a high card in a suit asks partner to switch to that suit.

A word of caution: Never discard a high card in a suit if there is any possibility that the card you pitch could possibly win a trick later.

A clear example of that would be if you hold KQT65 of a suit. If you are defending NT, then the 10 could very well take a trick. In this case, you should NOT discard the 10 but rather use the 6. It is good enough or perhaps better yet, to use the negative inference and pitch a very low card in another off-suit.

Hope that helps. If you have further questions, let me know.

db