

November 2015

In this article I want to talk about suit preference signals. This hand came up in the JBC pairs qualifying rounds earlier this year. I'm playing with Larry and our opponents are the young lads Greg Hingle and Bruce Wang.

Bidding

No one vulnerable

South	N	E	S	W
♠ AQJ82	pass	1D	1S (1)	2H
♥ 863	3S(2)	pass	pass	dbl
♦ Q6	all pass(3)			
♣ 754				

- (1) I am not proud of this overcall as my outside Q is in their suit so rates to be of little value. On top of that partner has already passed, my distribution is flat and apart from the spades my cards are tram tickets. But it's nearing the end of a lacklustre session where we need some results, perhaps this bid will mix things up a bit and at least Larry will get off to a good lead if West ends up as declarer. We're playing pairs so we can't get worse than a bottom and we might talk opponents out of a possible 3NT. However the bid comes with the usual health warning – don't try this at home.
- (2) When my partner jumps to 3S he confirms that he passed with nothing, but now his nothing includes some spades.
- (3) We're left to play in this contract doubled and I start running through excuses for making this anemic overcall opposite a passed hand, but things look up when dummy goes down

North

♠ K10954
♥ K1074
♦ 1075
♣ 3

South

♠ AQJ82
♥ 863
♦ Q6
♣ 754

If the cards are sitting kindly for me I could be making 8 tricks here whilst for the opponents at least 11 tricks in Clubs looks assured.

The Play

West leads the ♣K on which East drops the ♣9. West immediately switches to the ♥Q. Unless he's playing a very deep game, I don't think he holds the ace so I duck and sure enough East goes up with this card. East now returns the ♦9. I give this my best shot by playing the queen. There's a very small chance that East has underled from AK♦ in a desperate attempt to reach partner for a ruff. It also muddies the waters as to where the other honour cards sit. West wins with the king and returns the ♥J. I cover this with the king and East ruffs with ♠6. He then returns the ♦8 to partner's jack who carries on with the ♥9. This is ruffed with the ♠3. These guys have shot my hand to pieces but have finally run out of bullets. East plays the ♦A but I ruff high and claim the rest of the tricks for 2 down. We comment on the remarkable number of suit preference and other signals the lads have managed to make on this hand. It's all smiles and high 5s around the table

Here is the full deal

North

♠ K10954
♥ K1074
♦ 1075
♣ 6

West

♠
♥ QJ952
♦ KJ2
♣ KQ1082

East

♠ 763
♥ A
♦ A9843
♣ AJ93

South

♠ AQJ82
♥ 863
♦ Q6
♣ 754

Analysis

You can play dozens of hands where all you see is an occasional count signal, standard or upside down depending on preference, then suddenly a hand like this pops up and there is a veritable rash of signals. Let's analyze what they meant.

Trick 1 E ♣9

This is a Roman signal giving suit preference. When dummy is sitting with a singleton in the suit led, the hand on lead needs to know which suit to switch to, an unnecessarily high card from partner suggests the higher ranking suit whilst his lowest card suggests the lower suit. A middling card is neutral. Some prefer to use odd and even cards for suit preference signals, but that can be a little awkward when your cards in the suit are all odd or all even.

Trick 3 E ♦9

Partner, if you win this trick please lead back another Heart which I will ruff. The high diamond confirms that East wants his partner to continue playing the higher ranking suit.

Trick 4 W ♥J

Don't be put off by declarer's queen, I have the ♦J. A small heart at this stage by West would deny this card.

Trick 4 E ♠6

Start of a peter in trumps informing partner he has at least 3 trumps in case he's lucky enough to get 3 ruffs.

Trick 5 E ♦8

Partner, please lead back another heart.

Trick 6 S ♥9

Please play back another diamond

Trick 6 E ♠3

Completing the peter. I have another trump, partner.

I make that seven signals in the course of the hand, five suit preference signals and a trump peter.

Conclusion

This is what I call a win win hand. When we open the scoresheet we see that practically all the E-W pairs have bid and made 13 tricks in a minor suit game or slam. But the lads go home happy knowing they found the perfect defence against 3 spades doubled whilst probably setting a new South African record for the number of signals other than count in one bridge hand. We go home with a top.