



DISTRICT 16 LECTURE SERIES

COUNT SIGNALS
How, Why and When
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Why give count?

- The main reason that we give count is to help our partner with the defense
- Knowing the count in a suit can help partner with giving us a ruff, knowing how many times to hold up in a suit before winning an honor, or figuring out what card(s) to save in an ending



Opening Leads

Our first count information comes from what spot card we lead on defense

Opening Leads

- We quite often lead a side singleton when defending against a suit contract; based on the spot card led it is often clear that partner is leading a singleton
- From a doubleton we lead the higher spot card (some partnerships lead low from a doubleton but this must be disclosed)
- The standard lead from three is the low spot card lead; pairs that lead low from a doubleton have to lead the middle spot from three. Some pairs agree to lead MUD (middle up down) from three small.



Trying to decide what to lead

More Leads

- From four the standard lead is lowest, but most expert pairs now lead third highest; this allows partner to know the parity (odd or even) count in the suit
- From five the standard lead is fourth highest, but most expert pairs now lead lowest to show an odd number
- From six the standard lead is fourth highest, but again the expert standard is to lead third highest (showing an even number)
- Modern expert standard allows the defense to often know the count in the suit at trick one!



Defensive Ducking or “Hold-Up Plays”



The auction has gone 1N-P-3N-P-P-P

Dummy	♠ Q82	
	♥ J43	
West	♦ 93	East
♠ T94	♣ KQJT9	♠ AJ5
♥ QT6		♥ 8752
♦ QJT5	Declarer	♦ 8762
♣ A76	♠ K763	♣ 84
	♥ AK9	
	♦ AK4	
	♣ 532	

Holding Up or Ducking

Here declarer is in 3 NT after the auction 1N-3N. Let's say west leads the Q of diamonds. Declarer has 4 top tricks (AK of hearts and diamonds and can set up a spade trick for 5). They need 4 more tricks from the club suit. When they lead clubs, West needs to know how many rounds to hold up. East should signal count (show an even number) so that West will know to duck the first two club tricks. The standard way of giving count is to play high-low (8 then 4 of clubs in this case) to show an even number. Most experts now play upside-down count (the 4 then the 8 to show an even number). After two rounds of clubs ducked, declarer will only come to 8 tricks (2 clubs, 2 diamonds, 2 hearts, and 2 spades), with the defenders getting 2 spades, 2 diamonds, and 1 club trick. If the defender wins their ace of clubs too early, the declarer will win 4 clubs, 2 diamonds, 2 hearts, and a spade for 9 tricks, while the defenders will only get 1 club, 2 diamonds, and a spade.

Another Example

A very similar hand, and the same lead. This time the hand with K84 of clubs needs to duck the first one when their partner tells them they have an odd number (leaving declarer with just two). If you win the first club, declarer will score four club tricks. If you duck, declarer may only score one trick in the suit (if they come back and repeat the finesse you now will win).

Dummy		
	♠Q82	
	♥J43	
West	♦93	East
♠T94	♣AQJT9	♠AJ5
♥QT6		♥8752
♦QJT5	Declarer	♦876
♣762	♠K763	♣K84
	♥AK9	
	♦AK42	
	♣53	

Another Example

Again they have decided to play 3N (rather than 4S). 4S can go down on a club lead, losing a diamond, a club, a trump and a club ruff (if they try to pitch a club first before drawing trumps, the defense can duck a diamond and then play a heart, with declarer now losing a trick in each suit. What about 3N? If the defender wins the first spade when they finesse, they declarer will take 5 spades plus at least 4 side suit tricks. The defender must duck smoothly, even from a doubleton!

Vul:None Dir: N	♠ AQJ1095 ♥ 43 ♦ 76 ♣ 987	
♠ 842 ♥ K10862 ♦ 432 ♣ A2		♠ K6 ♥ 95 ♦ A985 ♣ Q10543
	♠ 73 ♥ AQJ7 ♦ KQJ10 ♣ KJ6	

Figuring out what to save

The opponents get to 7S on the queen of diamonds lead. Declarer can get to dummy twice, but the queen of clubs does not fall. East had nothing and will never take a trick, but west will need to know what to save! East must give accurate count so that West can figure out to save a diamond if south pitches a heart or a heart if south pitches a diamond.

	♠Q82	
	♥Q4	
West	♦932	East
♠94	♣KJ952	♠5
♥KJT6		♥87532
♦QJT	Declarer	♦8765
♣Q763	♠AKJT763	♣T84
	♥A9	
	♦AK4	
	♣A	

Giving partner a ruff (or not!)

Declarer is in 4S, and West leads the K of hearts (showing the Ace). East will want to show a doubleton to get their ruff to beat 4S. Otherwise declarer only loses two hearts and a club. Don't you wish you were in 3N instead!

	♠Q82	
	♥Q765	
West	♦93	East
♠T94	♣KQJT	♠65
♥AK84		♥92
♦QT5	Declarer	♦J87642
♣A76	♠AKJ73	♣984
	♥JT3	
	♦AK	
	♣532	

No ruff

If you cash the top two hearts, declarer will now be able to pitch their diamond loser. You must switch to a diamond if you know partner has 3 hearts.

	♠Q82	
	♥Q765	
West	♦93	East
♠T94	♣KQJT	♠5
♥AK84		♥T92
♦QT5	Declarer	♦KJ8762
♣A76	♠AKJ763	♣984
	♥J3	
	♦A4	
	♣532	

Don't give count if it is not needed

Sometimes declarer will have to guess how to play a suit, the defenders giving count will only help declarer and not partner. Here is an example. The defense leads a diamond against 3NT by south. Declarer has 4 spades and a diamond. If the set up a heart, the defense will take 4 diamonds and 2 hearts for down 2. So declarer needs 4 clubs tricks to come to 9 tricks. They can cash the King and Ace, but need to guess whether hearts are 4-2 or 3-3. If the defense gives honest count, declarer will make the contract. Do NOT give count in this situation. It can only help declarer.

	♠Q82	
	♥Q765	
West	♦93	East
♠T4	♣KQT2	♠9653
♥K984		♥A2
♦QT5	Declarer	♦KJ876
♣J976	♠AKJ7	♣84
	♥JT3	
	♦A42	
	♣A53	



Questions ?

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