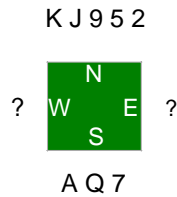


Discovering Distribution

By Steen Møller

Consider the play of this suit in a notrump contract:

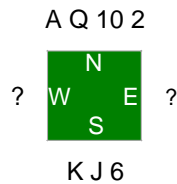


You probably think that it is not beyond your capacity to cash the ace, followed by the queen and the seven. You are, however, quite wrong. I did not deal you this suit to see you solve an unblocking problem, and you have just missed an excellent opportunity to test the honesty of your opponents and their methods. If you simply cash the ace, nobody will bother to reveal their distribution, but try the effect of leading the queen first!

Now each of the defenders might think that his partner holds the ace and will normally try hard to give count, so that partner can grab the ace at the right moment.

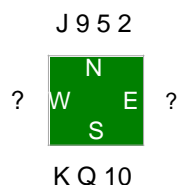
If one or both defenders manage to false card in this situation – and you will find out when you run the suit – you should not trust any of their signals for the rest of the session. I find it a considerable advantage to get a suit like this at the beginning of a Teams event, so that I know where I am for the rest of the match.

As you have seen in this example, the effect you want to achieve occurs by leading from your hand an honor card that is touching to one or more honor cards in dummy, and that has the air of being an unblocking play.



This suit offers a similar opportunity. Start with the jack from your hand and let it run. You should not pay any attention to the discards from East, but West will normally give an honest count signal. He has to consider the possibility, that his partner holds the king and will duck the jack. Therefore he feels obliged to help East and tell him when to take the king.

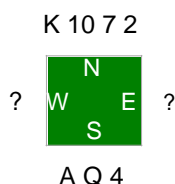
As you have seen by the two examples, the effect you want to obtain occurs by leading from your hand an honor card, that is touching to one or more honor cards in dummy, and that has the air of being an unblocking play.



With this combination you should lead the queen to test your opponents' count signals!

For various reasons this lead is also more likely than the lead of the king to locate the position of the ace. West, if holding the ace, will quite often cover the queen to protect partner's holding in the suit (remember that he cannot see the ten). East, if he holds the ace, may well take it to preserve a possible tempo or for fear of later crashing partner's king. The lead of the king does not have this effect, as it normally 'promises' the queen.

Having tested your opponent with one or two of the above-mentioned suit combinations and found out that they are quite honest, you may get a chance to use your knowledge later in the match.



Now you quite routinely play the queen to ensure that you get the count! West follows with the six and plays the nine under the ace. When you then play the four, he produces the three. This is rather confusing. What is going on, when your opponents are playing normal signals?

Well, it is quite simple. West started a count signal from J-9-6-3 with the intention of playing the three on the second round, when he expects you to play a low card towards dummy. When, you show up with the ace after the queen, he knows that he has given away the position. In an attempt to recover, he is now trying to disguise his length and show an odd number, but the play of the three on the third round reveals everything, and a finesse of the ten is almost sure to win – at least in my experience.

If your opponents play upside down signals, you will see the same thing happen when West holds 9-6-3. He starts with the six to show an odd number, then tries to fool you by throwing the nine, but the final play of the three discloses the distribution, and it is almost a sure thing to go up with the king and drop the jack from East's hand.

Now that you know how a nasty declarer tries to discover the distribution of your suits, you would probably want to know how to defend against this. I am sorry, but I cannot help you. There is hardly any defense except by illegal methods, and they are not recommended if you want to continue playing bridge.

Inspiration may help you, but if you are too inspired and partner seems to work it out most of the time, you are close to illegal methods. Holding the hand with 9-6-3 (using normal signals) you could of course play the six followed by the nine, being semi-honest to your partner, and then play the three, which would fool me if I was the nasty declarer. If from J-9-6-3 you have started with the six to show an even number, my advice to you is to follow normally with the three and then the nine. Most declarers are very suspicious of honesty like that, especially if they have not had the opportunity of testing you with another combination earlier in the match.

My BOLS bridge tip is this:

***Take the opportunity early in a match to discover the honesty
of your opponents' signaling – it may help you later on***