



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(131) Defensive Details - A/Q for Attitude, K for Count or Unblock

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Level: 3

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General

When we lead an honor (against a suit or a notrump contract) it is important for us to know what piece of information partner is trying to communicate with us. If we have a mix-up about what partner is showing (or what we are showing to partner) it can be very costly to our defense and we may not be able to recover from this early mistake. Let's look at a set of agreements that might help us better communicate with partner by allowing partner to understand what we are leading from and allowing us to understand what partner is trying to show us.

Notrump Defense – Power Leads (K for Count or Unblock)

When we are on lead against a notrump contract and we have a good suit to lead from with several honors, we lead one of those honors. Partner will generally give us an attitude signal – do they have a useful card in our suit? When our suit is extremely powerful, we do not care much about partner's attitude in our suit. Instead, we want partner to give us a count signal (or unblock any honor they have) so that we know the layout of the suit around the table.

The way we accomplish this is by having a special agreement that K asks for a Count Signal (and that Ace or Queen asks for an Attitude Signal) on opening lead. This is the opposite of Standard American lead conventions but is common in England.

These are examples of powerful holdings from which we will lead our "Power Card" – King!

AKQx+

AKJxx+

AKJT+

KQJx+

KQT9+

KQTxx+



In these cases, if partner unblocks their honor then we will be able to run the suit or safely continue it and are unlikely to give up an extra trick because partner wasted their honor. If partner does not unblock their honor, denying that they have it, then they will give count and we will then know the layout of the suit around the table. In the examples where we are missing the Queen (say we have AKJ+) then from partner's count, we will know whether we can drop declarer's Qx or if declarer has Qxx and we need to get partner in to lead through declarer's positional stopper.

Common Example -

	xxx	
AKJxx		xx(x)
	Qx(x)	

A/Q for Attitude, K for Count in Suit Contract

It is possible (and sometimes useful) to be able to get count information from partner when defending suit contracts. This will be true when we have powerful holdings and don't need any honor-attitude information from partner. We can agree to lead the King (asking for count) in these situations also. This is also not Standard American.

Examples

AKQx+

KQJx+

AKxxx++

This agreement can help us know how many honors (tricks) to cash before the opponents will ruff in (before declarer will be out of cards in the suit).

This agreement that "K asks for count" affects our choices for opening leads. From AK+ we can lead either the Ace or King depending on our holding. From KQ+ we lead the K from strong holdings (to just get count in the suit) and lead the Q from KQ+ when we want an attitude signal.

Note: This adds some complexity to partner's ability to work out what our lead is from, but it does clarify what information we are looking for from partner and is frequently a useful tradeoff.

Carding – Upside Down Attitude (UDA)

If we play UDA then we have the complexity whether to play high from xx to show count or to play low from xx to show attitude in order to get partner to continue the suit and give us a ruff. This is why it is important to know what kind of signal partner is expecting us to give at trick 1 – A/Q for attitude and K for count helps clarify this situation.



Conclusion

Having good agreements about signaling can be difficult – especially at trick 1. Having the simple agreement that A or Q asks for an attitude signal and K asks for a count signal allows us to effectively communicate with partner. This agreement, though not perfect, is a good tool for helping partner get the information that would be the most useful for this hand!