

## SIGNALING WHEN DISCARDING

“**Signaling**” is the language of defensive play, and a fundamental aspect of the game of Bridge. It is the method by which Defenders legitimately exchange information about the make-up of their hands, the suits in which they hold strength, and, therefore, which suit a Player wishes Partner to play if the opportunity to do so arises. The signaling manner selected by any team must be discussed and agreed-to by the Partners in order to avoid confusion and error, and the method chosen must be disclosed to the Opponents by means of posting upon the teams’ Convention Card. During the play of any hand, whenever a Defender **first** discards (“*Sluffs*”); i.e., the first time that Player fails to be capable of following to the suit which has been led by either team, an opportunity becomes available for signaling to one’s Partner. The following four methods are the most commonly used to indicate a level of interest in the suit indicated by the card which is discarded.

### Methods Used For Defensive Signaling When First Discarding

- 1. Standard Discarding:** This method employs a positive or negative attitude signal by means of discarding a conspicuously ***high discard*** which shows a ***positive attitude*** toward the suit being discarded, and a by similarly discarding a conspicuously ***low discard*** which shows a ***negative attitude*** toward the suit being discarded. Standard signals are commonly given with cards from the Two-spot to the Nine-spot and are usually recognizable by deductive reasoning from the other cards in the suit which can be seen in the Dummy and in one’s hand, and/or from the cards remaining other than the ones which have already been played. For example, if a relatively high card, an 8 of Hearts, is first discarded when a Spade is called-for, it signifies probable strength and a preference for Hearts to be led if and when possible. Similarly if a relatively low card, a 3 of Clubs, is first discarded when a Diamond is called for, it signifies a lack of preference for the Club suit, in general.

#### The Disadvantages of the Standard Discarding:

- a. Playing a relatively high card in order to show a positive attitude wastes a potentially useful card which might later be needed for its trick-taking potential.
- b. A relatively high card might not be available in the suit you desire to be led. Conversely, a relatively low card might not be available in the suit you wish to discourage.

- 2. Upside-down (“Reverse”) Discarding:** This method is the reverse of “Standard Discarding,” shown above; i.e., a relatively low discard shows encouragement for the lead of a suit being discarded, and a relatively high discard shows discouragement for the suit being discarded. For example, if a relatively low card, a 2 of Spades, is first discarded when a Heart is called-for, it signifies probable strength and a preference for Spades to be led, if and when possible. Similarly if a relatively high card, an 8 of Clubs, is first discarded when a Diamond is called for, it signifies a lack of preference for the Club suit.

#### The Advantage of Upside-Down Discarding:

It avoids wasting a high card to signal positive attitude in the suit desired.

**3. Odd-Even (“Roman”) Discarding:** This method uses an odd discard (a 3, 5, 7, or 9) to encourage the suit discarded and an even discard (a 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10) to discourage the suit being discarded, and is best used when defending against suit contracts. In addition, the discarding of any even discouraging discard also shows encouragement for the higher or lower of the remaining two suits consistent with it being either a high or low, even discard. Thus a first discard of any odd card is encouraging. In addition, a first discard of a high-even spot-card discourages that suit, and is a suit-preference signal for the higher-ranking of the two side suits; (**Example 1:** The first discard of an 8 of Hearts when unable to follow to the play of Spades shows a preference for Diamonds) (**Example 2:** The first discard of a low-even spot-card discourages that suit, and is a suit-preference signal for the lower-ranking of the two side suits - The first discard of a 2 of Diamonds when unable to follow to the play of Hearts shows a preference for Clubs).

**The Advantages of Odd-Even Discarding:**

- a. It is infrequent, when defending against a suit contract, that a low odd card’s trick-taking capacity is wasted, when used to signal encouragement.
- b. While discouraging an unwanted suit by means of an even discard, you can also show a preference for one of the remaining two suits; i.e., a relatively high-even discard suggests a shift to the higher-ranking of the other two suits, and a relatively low-even discard suggests a shift to the lower-ranking of the other two suits.
- c. When wishing to signal the desire for a suit, but lacking an odd card with which to encourage, an alternative signal can be given by the play of a high-even discard which encourages the higher-ranking of the two remaining suits, and the play of a low-even discard which encourages the lower-ranking of the two remaining suits.
- d. When defending against a suit contract using the odd-even signaling method of discarding, there usually exists a duplicity of choices with which to signal, as per (b) and (c) shown above, and this duplicity facilitates the job so as not to have to sometimes use a card that might otherwise be needed for the defense of the hand.

**4. Lavinthal (McKenney) Discarding:** This method uses the rank of the card to show suit preference, and is best used against No-Trump contracts. A low first discard shows preference for the lower-ranking suit other than the suit called-for and the suit used to signal, while a high first discard shows a preference for the higher-ranking suit other than the suit called-for and the suit used to signal. For example, the first discard of a 2 of Spades on a trick which calls for a Heart, would show a preference for Clubs; and a discard of a 9 of Diamonds on a trick which calls for a Club would show a preference for Spades.

**The Advantages of Lavinthal Discarding:**

- a. They suggest a shift to a given suit from the two suits other than the suit being discarded and the suit which has not been followed, irrespective of being odd or even, therefore affording a larger selection of cards with which to potentially signal.
- b. They avoid wasting a high card in a suit to which you wish Partner to shift. This is particularly advantageous when defending against No-Trump contracts when preservation of the cards in one’s long and strong suit remains potentially useful.