



Ace for Attitude, King for Count

by Neil Rosen

MANY partnerships have serious problems resolving when they should be signalling either attitude or count.

Indeed some partnerships take it to an extreme and *only* play one or the other. This seems to me very limiting, as clearly, assuming both members of the partnership can get on the same wavelength, there are many instances when both are necessary.

With reference to the opening lead, a style which has come into vogue is to play:

Ace for Attitude (A = Attitude)

King for Count (K = Kount)

This alliteration can certainly help with memory!

The principle is that against *trump* contracts (I will deal with no-trump contracts in the next article) the opening leader can decide in advance which signal he wishes to receive before he actually makes the lead.

On the lead of the *ace* (or indeed any honour *other* than the king, to be accurate) you will receive an *attitude* signal (standard or reverse – this is by partnership choice, of course). Whereas the lead of a king will receive a *count* signal.

Defending High-level Contracts

People have known of these methods for a long time; in fact many have always played that at high levels (usually the five level or above) the necessity to be able to ‘cash out’ side suits is vital. Thus at the five level or above I strongly recommend leading the king from an ace-king holding in a suit to receive a *count*, not an attitude signal. So from A-K-x-x lead the king, not the ace: partner’s signal will be able to tell you how many tricks you can attempt to cash in this suit before declarer can ruff in. If defending against a slam, playing this method gives you a real

chance to defeat the contract – if, of course, there is any chance at all.

Defending Lower-level Trump Contracts

This method of playing ace for attitude and king for count can most certainly be applied at lower level contracts as well, of course, provided some examination of principles and ideas takes place.

I recommend leading the king for count when you have A-K-Q, K-Q-J, or indeed A-K only, but with greater length. Thus:

A-K-Q-x
A-K-Q-x-x
K-Q-J-x
K-Q-J-x-x
A-K-x-x-x
A-K-x-x-x-x

But look at these also:

A-K-x-x
K-Q-x-x
Q-J-x-x

So essentially you make your standard lead, but when holding both the ace (or another honour) and king you can choose which one to lead. The idea is that when holding nice solid sequences like A-K-Q or K-Q-J, all you really need concern yourself about is how many cards partner has in the suit, rather than the added worry of whether it is safe to even continue the suit at all.

There are actually ‘negative inferences’ to be drawn sometimes. If for example partner leads an ace at trick one, we can surmise that he does not hold A-K-Q of the suit. This may well help in building up a picture of the unseen declarer’s hand.

Varying the Signal Once Dummy Appears

There are three very important extra factors to



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consider, once dummy has appeared, after an ace or king have been led:

1. If the queen is visible in dummy, I suggest that the partner of the opening leader gives count, irrespective of whether an ace or king is led. Some partnerships choose to vary this depending on how long the suit is in dummy – I do not recommend this.
2. a) If dummy has A-x-x and declarer ducks the king lead . . . who has the jack? Clearly if it is the opening leader there is no problem whatsoever so you must concern yourself with when he does not hold it. If declarer has the jack, this is a variation of the ‘Bath Coup’ whereby if the leader continues the suit he will present declarer with an extra trick. The solution is to switch to attitude forgetting about count on any king lead when there is a possible Bath Coup type situation.
b) If dummy has just small cards, the same conundrum occurs where you must switch to an attitude signal for the same reasons as above, e.g.



On the lead of the king, East must not blindly give a count signal here – he should give an attitude signal to prevent West fatally continuing the suit and presenting declarer with the dreaded extra trick in the suit.

So the rule is that a king gets a count signal *but* with sight of dummy this can (and should) change to attitude in possible Bath Coup situations.

3. If dummy has a singleton in the suit led, whether an ace or a king was led, modern theory suggests you actually give a *suit preference* signal rather than attitude or count.

Leads Later in the Play

Most partnerships concentrate their efforts on trick one leads and signals but you can, of course, choose to adopt those same principles later in the play too.

Consider:



If during the play (before trumps are drawn, perhaps) East gets on play, he can lay down the king of this suit. When South cannot produce the ace West can deduce that East has the ace and the king, and should therefore give a count signal as asked. If East plays the ace, then West should encourage holding the king, otherwise he should discourage, not play high-low to show a doubleton etc.

Using these types of methods allow partnerships to start communicating more and more effectively – while following the boundaries and suggestions I have laid out will help to resolve most of the problems or ambiguities which might otherwise arise.

Next time we will look at defending no-trump contracts and pay specific attention to the use of ‘Strong King’ leads – not to be confused with this month’s subject matter! □

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