



by Peter J. Boyd-Bowman

SIGNALING . . . Part One of Three

Playing South, both vulnerable, you deal and pick up: ♠ J 5 3 ♥ A 8 7 3 ♦ A K 9 5 ♣ A 4

This is a fine hand and you open a strong NT. LHO chimes in with 2♠, which is passed around back to you. You ask, and are told 2♠ is simply natural, probably with 6 or more spaces. You pass.

Partner leads the J♣, and greeted with a fine dummy for the declarer: ♠ 2 ♥ K Q J 5 ♦ Q 10 8 4 3 ♣ Q 8 5

10 points in the dummy, even without a trump fit, is rarely a pleasant sight after this auction. Nevertheless, the scoring is matchpoints so the overtricks matter.

Declarer calls for the 5. Instinctually you play low, not wanting to squander your ace on low cards (this will likely be an ineffective maneuver with only a doubleton club— declarer will rarely go wrong when later leading to the K♣).

Declarer now plays the A, K and Q of trump, partner following to all three rounds with the 4, 7 and 10. The 10♥ is met with the 2, 5 and your ace. You try your A♦, declarer plays the 7, partner the 2, low from dummy. You casually try to cash the K♦ before cashing your A♣, but declarer surprises you by ruffing!

A low heart is led to the board, and the declarer proceeds to discard 3 clubs underneath dummy's two hearts and the Q♦; making 5 for a minus 200. This scores only half a matchpoint; holding the declarer to making four saves 5 matchpoints, or about half a board. What went wrong?

Any partnership serious about improving their game in the arena of defense must be committed to learning, understanding, and effectively applying the use of signaling. Count is an all-too-often overlooked or ignored signaling possibility for a sound defender. In standard methods, when a count signal is given a low card shows an odd number of cards in the suit, while a high card shows an even number of cards in the suit.

What went wrong is that we weren't paying attention to partner's count signal! When declarer played the A♦, partner played the 2. Staring at dummy's Qxxx of diamonds, what information could partner possibly need to know other than how many cards you have in that suit? ***When an ace is led (from AK), and the Queen is in dummy, this is a situation for a count signal.***

Partner's 2 shows an odd number of cards in the suit, which means 1 or 3 (holding J 2 or 6 2, partner would play the higher card first). Clearly, if partner had a singleton diamond, she would have led it. This means partner has 3 diamonds, and declarer only 1! Cashing the A♣ is now clear.