



by Peter J. Boyd-Bowman

SIGNALING . . . Part Two of Three

On the first board of an early round at a recent Swiss Teams, sitting West I picked up:

♠A108765 ♥J4 ♦932 ♣K6

My RHO opened a 15 to 17 NT in third seat. I considered competing but my poor spade suit and lack of extra shape really doesn't merit a bid. North thought for a moment before bidding the usual 3NT—this ended the auction as it so often does.

I had a normal looking spade lead, so I led a fourth best 7 and saw this dummy:

♠6 ♥Q93 ♦KQJ10 ♣J10742

3NT is a little aggressive but a normal enough action at IMPs. Dummy's 6 brought partner's jack and declarer's king. Declarer now played ace and a diamond to the board, partner playing the 7 then the 4. Declarer called for the club jack, partner playing the 9 and declarer the 5. Your king wins the trick. What should you play now?

Our problem is that we don't know what spade position to cater to. If partner began with QJx and declarer Kx, then we want to continue with a low spade. But if partner began with Jx, a low spade would be disastrous, giving declarer a trick she wasn't entitled to.

One of my favorite carding agreements I've learned since becoming a Life Master is the Smith Echo, or rather the Reverse Smith Echo (like so many gadgets, earlier versions are discarded to give bridge authors new material to write on).

Smith is generally on only against no trump contracts. After the opening lead, the signal given is with the card played when the declarer leads to establish a suit. If a defender (either the opening leader or her partner) "liked" the opening lead, they play the lowest spot possible. If they didn't like the opening lead, they play an unnecessarily high spot card. As with all signals, Smith can only be given if you can "afford" to give the signal (ie playing the signal card doesn't jeopardize a useful spot card). To summarize, *a low card in the first side suit declarer starts encourages a continuation of the originally led suit, and a high card discourages a continuation.*

With that in mind, take a look our earlier problem. Partner played the club nine, clearly her highest spot. If partner had the spade queen, she'd be encouraging a continuation. So the NT opener has the spade K and Q, the diamond A, and likely the A and Q of clubs from her play so far; that's 15HCP. That leaves declarer no room to have honors in hearts, and the defense becomes clear—The full deal:

♠ 6	♠ 6	♠ J4
♥ Q93	♥ J4	♥ AK102
♦ KQJ10	♦ 932	♦ 7654
♣ J10742	♣ K6	♣ 93
	♠ A108752	♠ KQ3
	♥ 8765	♥ 8765
	♦ A8	♦ A8
	♣ AQ85	♣ AQ85

A spade continuation at trick five allows declarer to take 10 tricks; the heart jack switch allows the defense to take 9 tricks (a club, 3 hearts, and 5 spades) for a 5 trick set! Quite a difference.

As with any bidding or carding agreement, make sure you and your partner are on the same page. This is little more difficult of a gadget and might not be best for newer players or partnerships. You also need to recognize the situations when the need for a count signal