

## DEFENCE 20 – IMPROVING DEFENSIVE SIGNALS VII

When defending a no trump contract, you should have agreements with your major partners as to what the opening lead of an ace or king means, or what it asks for. There are a number of ways you can do this, but I like the following:

- (1) The opening lead of an ace almost always promises the king and asks where the queen is. Partner should encourage with the queen and discourage otherwise.
- (2) The opening lead of a king asks partner to encourage with the ace or jack, but discourage otherwise. One exception – with the queen, they should throw it under the king.

Let's look at these ideas in action (playing low encourage):

	4	
AKJ32		Q95
	10876	

West leads the ace. East encourages with the 5 to show they have the queen. West now leads a low card to East's queen and East continues the suit giving EW all 5 tricks in a smooth fashion. What I often see in this situation is West plays AK and blocks the suit.

	42	
AKJ52		1096
	Q87	

West leads the ace and East discourages with the 10 to show they don't have the queen. West can now switch suits in the hope of East getting in and leading through declarer's Q8 to get all 5 tricks in the suit.

	42	
KQ1053		987
	AJ6	

West leads the king, East discourages with the 9 to show they don't have the ace or the jack, and declarer ducks with the 6. West should now change suits so declarer doesn't get a free trick with the J, and hope East can later get in and lead through declarer's AJ.

	42	
KQ1053		J96
	A87	

West leads the king, East encourages with the 6, and declarer ducks with the 7. Knowing East has the ace or jack, West can confidently lead a low card now and the ace will be knocked out.

AKJ102	4 8763	Q95
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West leads the king, and East throws the queen under it. West now cashes the rest of the suit.

Here's an example of a situation where the defenders didn't have some agreement and let a 3NT contract make:

Dealer: W  
Vul: Both

	♠ 9873 ♥ 64 ♦ KQ92 ♣ QJ8	
♠ 2 ♥ 97 ♦ 764 ♣ AK106532		♠ J654 ♥ AK52 ♦ A5 ♣ 974
	♠ AKQ10 ♥ QJ1083 ♦ J1083 ♣	

W	N	E	S
3♣	P	3NT	P
P	P		

I was in a teams match, where bidding the games and getting the game bonus are all important, so I bid an aggressive 3NT from the East seat hoping for 6-7 clubs with the ♥AK and ♦A.

My South opponent played ♠AKQ and then switched to ♥Q. I won ♥A and ducked a club to North (if you play ♣AK and another you strand the club suit in dummy). I had 6 clubs, ♥AK and ♦A for 9 tricks.

How should the defence go?

South leads ♠K and North plays ♠9 denying the spade ace or the jack. South can play another top spade to make sure the ♠9 wasn't from ♠J9, but then must switch – say to the ♥Q. When East tries to duck a club to North, North wins and leads a spade through the J6 to partner's Q10 and you collect 4 spade tricks and a club to put the contract down.