

DEFENCE 19 – IMPROVING DEFENSIVE SIGNALS VI

“Return your partner’s suit” is a reasonably helpful maxim on the defence. However, having played for a while you’ve no doubt realised it can be downright disastrous on occasions. A better maxim would be “Return your partner’s suit if you can see no better option”.

The first order of business is to turn your head 90 degrees and study dummy. Is the suit lead now solid in dummy but dummy has another suit with only small cards? This looks like a clear switch. But sometimes things aren’t so clear cut.

There is a lovely defensive signal in no trump contracts called **Reverse Smith’s Echo**. It works this way:

1. Say you or partner lead a suit and declarer wins, or wins after holding up a while.
2. On declarer’s next lead, if either of you reverse (ie play high low) you are asking for a switch.

Let’s have a look at this signal in action at the recent Gold Coast congress in the Swiss Pairs:

Dealer: S

Vul: EW

	♠ J632 ♥ Q1082 ♦ Q104 ♣ 109	
♠ 854 ♥ AJ74 ♦ KJ7 ♣ J74	♠ KQ10 ♥ 95 ♦ 865 ♣ 86532	♠ A97 ♥ K63 ♦ A932 ♣ AKQ

S	W	N	E
P	P	P	2NT (20-22)
P	3C (puppet stayman)	P	3NT (No 4 or 5 card major)

I led C6, declarer winning with the CA. Declarer now played HK and led another heart for an unsuccessful finesse. Can you see partner’s problem in North? I might have led the C6 from KQ86 (or longer) – though this begs the question why declarer didn’t try to hold up. Should partner be returning your suit?

From the South hand, I thought declarer has this contract in the bag, with at least 20 points in hand and 10 in dummy. I thought we had to get our spades as quickly as possible or give away overtricks. So, I played H9 then H5 asking for a switch from partner. He found the S2 without too much problem and declarer held up the SA for 2 rounds taking the third and then, when hearts didn’t break, took the unsuccessful diamond finesse, going one down (3 spades, DQ and HQ).

One exception to reverse Smith's echo – if dummy has a long suit and not much else, you generally need to give count so partner can tell when to take their high trick in the suit and cut declarer off from dummy.

Do you notice declarer's mistake?

Dealer: S
Vul: EW

	♠ J632	
	♥ Q1082	
	♦ Q104	
	♣ 109	
♠ 854		♠ A97
♥ AJ74		♥ K63
♦ KJ7		♦ A932
♣ J74		♣ AKQ
	♠ KQ10	
	♥ 95	
	♦ 865	
	♣ 86532	

Declarer has 8 tricks on top (CAKQ, DAK, HAK and SA). The extra trick could come from either red suit finesse being successful or one of those suits breaking 3-3. Which one should you play first?

The diamonds. The D9 gives you a small extra chance if the finesse doesn't work and the suit doesn't break 3-3 that South might have the doubleton D10 and the D9 comes good.

So, play DA, finesse in diamonds, win the spade return, and now DK getting the good news of the 3-3 break. It is lucky that it was the diamonds breaking and not the hearts but that's the reward for good play 😊.