

Aggressive Preempting and Defensive Signaling

You are playing in the Secaucus Regional open pairs on Saturday 8/20/2005. With nobody vulnerable partner deals and opens with 2♦. The next player passes and you hold: ♠KJ1054 ♥985 ♦2 ♣KJ84.

You and your partner play a very aggressive preempting style, where weak 2 bids are frequently opened with 5-card suits, but almost never with 5-3-3-2 distribution. Over the bid a response of 2NT is a modified Ogust, where partner bids 3clubs with a 5-card suit, and next 3 step bids bid shows 6-card suits with either minimum, average, or maximum values for the weak 2 bid. And a bid of a new suit is non-forcing and constructive. You can bid a new suit 1) looking for a better part score contract, 2) as a lead director with a decent suit and a fit with partner, 3) to try to steal the hand from your opponents, or 4) because with a 4-card fit you can make a game or sacrifice against the opponent's fit potential. On this hand is your hand good enough to bid?

Playing traditional weak 2 bids with a new suit response as forcing, you would never consider bidding. You are too weak, and appear likely to be on a misfit. But you have been convinced recently to try this new style. To a traditional player it is abnormal to bid on a hand like this. But I recommend bidding 2♠ on this hand. You need to realize that your suit can easily be just as good as your partner's suit, and that 2♦ will usually be a worse contract than 2♠ because of your shortness in diamonds. And you need to understand how the opener responds to your 2♠ bid. The opener will only jump to 4♠ with 4-card support and maximum values. With less than that opener will choose between raising to 3♠, passing, or further describing his hand. Finally, you need to realize that the risk of bidding and getting doubled in a part score contract is much less likely than the damage you can do to the opponent's auction by bidding. Many opponents are not used to this style and are afraid to enter the bidding for fear of running into a misfit and getting penalized. And even if the opponents are brave enough to enter the bidding, the extra preempting may push them to the wrong contract, and the defense can be very exacting because you have exchanged information.

On this day the next hand does not get bullied out of the bidding, but overcalls 2NT. Partner then raises to 4♠ and the next player bids 5♥, all pass. You lead your singleton diamond and partner wins the first two diamond tricks with the ♦K and ♦A. What do you discard at trick 2? .

	<u>Dummy</u>				
	♠A8				
	♥Q104				
	♦QJ107				
<u>You</u>	♣AQ53				
♠KJ1054		Partner	Declarer	You	Dummy
♥985		2♦	Pass	2♠	2NT
♦2		4♠	5♥	All Pass	
♣KJ84					

While you consider your signal at trick 2, you admire the dummy's bid of 2NT. Many opponents would have either passed or made an off-shape takeout double. Some might have considered 2NT but been afraid that it would be interpreted as sandwich NT (takeout for the 2 unbid suits, usually 5-5 in shape). I recommend playing sandwich NT at the 1-level after the opponents have bid 2 suits. And if the opponents had unlimited strength for their two bids, I would recommend playing sandwich NT at the 2-level also. I have never discussed this auction with most partners. On this auction, where both opponents have limited their strength, I like playing 2NT as natural - that would be the standard agreement.

Now it is time to signal partner.

With this partner you are playing UDCA (upside down count and attitude). That means that a low card, like a 2, 3, 4, or 5 is encouraging, while a high card like a 7, 8, 9, or 10 is discouraging (as long as you can afford to discard the appropriate spot card--- sometimes with K98 you will be forced to encourage with the 8 and discourage with the 9 and hope that partner can read it).

This is an interesting situation to discuss with partner.

Do you want to tell partner that you have good clubs? No you don't - if you discard a club you will let declarer win 3 club tricks, where he might be able to discard a key spade loser. You don't want to trump, so you must discard a spade.

Do you want to let partner your partner know that have good spades? Some partnerships say that the encouraging 4♠ is just informative, to let your partner know that you have good spades. I don't like that style. I would play the ♠4 only when I want partner to lead spades. For example, if I held the ♠KJ1054 ♥K85 ♦2 ♣9842 I would want partner to lead spades, because I want to establish our spade trick while I maintain my heart stopper, so declarer cannot draw trump and discard spades on dummy's minor suit winners. This could be the entire hand:

	Dummy	
	♠A8	
	♥Q104	
	♦QJ107	
You	♣AQ53	Partner
♠KJ1054		♠9732
♥K85		♥9
♦2		♦AK8654
♣9842	Declarer	♣J10
	♠Q6	
	♥AJ7632	
	♦93	
	♣K62	

On that hand I want to ask partner to lead spades, so we guarantee beating the contract by 2 tricks. If partner continues with diamonds, declarer can escape for down one.

On the actual hand I want partner to continue leading diamonds. Therefore, I will discourage with the spade 10. In theory, the 10 denies the jack, but I am willing to deny the jack to direct the defense. Whether declarer or I have the jack does not affect partner's play. I could play the jack instead of the ten, but in some situations if I discourage strongly in one suit, it is the equivalent of encouraging strongly in the second suit -- when no encouraging spots are available in the second suit. Since the spade ten is less discouraging than the spade jack, I prefer to signal with the ♠10. With some partners I could play the ♠5, which would encourage in spades but since partner would not see the ♠4, he would probably find the desired diamond play. But since declarer could have begun with the ♠Q4, in a good partnership the play of the ♠5 should be interpreted as requesting a spade lead. After I discourage in spades and do not request a club lead, I expect partner to choose to continue with the most obvious defense, that being to continue leading diamonds to potentially promote a trump trick for the defense and at the same time, to eliminate one of dummy's winning diamonds for discards.

This was the actual hand:

	Dummy	
	♠A8	
	♥Q104.	
	♦QJ107	
You	♣AQ53	Partner
♠KJ1054		♠9732
♥985		♥K
♦2		♦AK8654
♣KJ84	Declarer	♣72
	♠Q6	
	♥AJ7632	
	♦93	
	♣1096	

Here, when your partner interprets your signal correctly and continues with a third diamond. Declarer can still make the contract if he makes anti-percentage guesses. (He would have to ruff with the J♥, continue with the heart ace, draw trump, and proceed to squeeze you in the black suits). In fact, you are a heavy favorite to defeat the 5♥ contract one trick.

Disclaimer: When this hand occurred, I held the East hand. My partner was new to playing new-suit non-forcing in response to weak 2 bids, and did not bid 2♠. Therefore, we let the opponents play in 4♥. And my partner also played the 4♠ at trick 2 (thinking it was merely informative), so I shifted to spades, which allowed declarer to make an overtrick. So, my write-up of this hand is fictitious, and I apologize for the deceit. The write-up of the hand follows the result that I wanted to have on the hand, and I chose this hand as the hand of the month for September because I think it is a great teaching hand. I hope my readers and partner enjoy it as much as I do.