Adventures in Bridge
Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education
www.advinbridge.com

This Week in Bridge

(132) Defensive Details: Smith Echo (Reverse)

© AiB

Level: 4

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When we lead to trick one against a notrump contract, we can often be left with an ambiguous situation about the position of the honors and the layout of the suit around the table. This can lead to a lot of confusion about what to do when we regain the lead. Smith Echo is used to help us resolve this problem.

Smith Echo

When we lead a suit on opening lead against a notrump contract and the declarer wins the trick, he will frequently go about attacking and setting up a long suit of his own. In this situation, count will often not be a particularly useful thing for us as the defense to communicate to partner at trick two (we will later discuss when count will still be needed). Instead of giving count at trick two, when we play Smith Echo, we agree to give attitude about the opening lead suit. Both defenders (assuming they are not involved in trying to win the trick) signal whether they like the opening lead suit.

If we play standard carding, we play a high card to say we like the led suit (Smith Echo) and if we play upside-down attitude we play a low card to say we like the opening lead (Reverse Smith Echo). Most players play the same Smith Echo (standard or reverse) as their attitude signals.

Example

Imagine we lead 4th best from ♠ATx**xx**, partner produces the Jack (with nothing useful on dummy), and declarer wins the King. Now we have a problem in that we do not know who has the ♠Q. If we win a trick after that we won't know if we should continue ♠ (low to partner's Queen and then back to us to run our suit) or if we need to try to get partner in by finding an entry to their hand in another suit so they can lead through declarer's ♠Q stopper.

This is where Smith Echo can help us. Partner can use Smith Echo at trick two to tell us if they like our lead (if they have the missing honor).   If they "Smith" then we know to continue our suit and if they do not, then we know to look for a way to get partner on lead.

Detailed Example

Auction

1♣	1♦
1NT	2♥
2NT	3NT

Hand

```
              ♠ 7
              ♥ KQ84
              ♦ KJT75
              ♣ AJ6
♠ AT963                    ♠ J842
♥ 95                       ♥ AT72
♦ A64                      ♦ 82
♣ T85                      ♣ 974
              ♠ KQ5
              ♥ J63
              ♦ Q93
              ♣ KQ32
```

At trick one we lead ♠6 (4th best), ♠7 from dummy, ♠J from partner, and ♠K from declarer.

When we win the ♦A at trick two, partner plays the ♦2 – telling us they don't like ♠ (they do not have the ♠Q), so we want to get them on lead in some other suit. ♦ and ♠ are out and the ♣A is in the dummy, so we play a ♥ to partner's Ace, and now partner can lead a ♠ to us to allow us to capture declarer's ♠Q and run the suit.

Opening leader can also use Smith Echo to say either "return my suit" or "shift to what looks better." If we lead from Jxxxx and it is clear declarer has AKQ (say they win the Queen at trick 1), then when partner gets on lead we probably want them to shift to dummy's other weakest suit, not return our lead. We do this by using Smith Echo (or the lack of one) ourselves to tell partner not to return our lead – "Please shift to a new suit!"

Sometimes Count Overrules Smith Echo

Smith Echo is generally much more useful than count in a suit declarer is strong in and trying to set up in notrump at trick two. But sometimes it is clear that count is a very important piece of information.

Example

Imagine that dummy has KQJTx and no outside entries. In this situation, partner needs to know our count in the suit so they can take their Ace at the correct time.

It can be a challenge to make sure you and partner are on the same page about when to give count. But in these cases, we must give count instead of Smith (attitude about the opening lead) because count is so vital.

Advanced Note: We generally do not play any "delayed Smith," meaning if partner wins trick one and continues the suit then we should be able to work out what is going on. In this case we do not use Smith Echo at trick three when declarer leads another suit.

Conclusion

Versus notrump contracts, Smith Echo (or Reverse) is a valuable tool in helping partner know if we like the opening lead that our side has started with. Like most good agreements, what we give up (count at trick two) is often not particularly useful and thus makes Smith Echo a good agreement and upgrade. Give it a try with a regular partner and see if it can improve your notrump defense.