

Fifth Chair



Smith Echo

SMITH ECHO is used primarily against a No Trump contract, but can also be used when declarer is playing a suit contract.

After the opening lead, this convention refers to the card played, if you can afford it, when declarer leads to develop a suit. If you as defender LIKED the opening lead, you play a higher than necessary card to this second suit, or trump. If you didn't like the opening lead, then you play your smallest card as declarer is leading a suit.

Spades were led against a NT contract. Now declarer leads Hearts.

Your hand holds the 10 8 6 of hearts. If you liked the opening spade lead, play the 10 of hearts. If you did NOT like the Spade lead, play the 6 of hearts.

Although this does not always work, it's helpful in determining how to continue to defend the contract.

The SMITH ECHO is a convention that aims to give opening leader an indication of 3rd hand's attitude toward the opening lead.

It is usually played against NT contracts only; however it can be used in either, with partnership agreement.

The problem faced by the opening leader can be seen in these two suit arrangements:

xxx

ATxxx (1) QJx

Kx

xxx

ATxxx (2) Jx

KQx

In (1), west leads small, east plays the jack, and south wins the king. The suit is now ready to run, but west does not know this because the situation might be as in (2), with declarer falsecarding by winning the king (the technically correct card to play).

Using the SMITH ECHO solves this problem. When east follows suit to the 2nd trick of the hand, he plays a HIGH spot card to show encouragement to the opening lead and a LOW spot card to show discouragement to the opening lead.

Some pairs play Reverse Smith Echo, in which a LOW spot card would encourage and a HIGH spot card discourage.

Smith Echo is on in all cases EXCEPT when dummy has NO apparent entry and the defenders need to know opener's length in the suit.

In this situation, count takes preference over Smith Echo.

There is an ethical problem with Smith that should not go unmentioned. A 'slow Smith' Echo often is used to show encouragement by length as opposed to encouragement by honor strength. The reason for this is that whilst it is clearly right to encourage west when holding an undisclosed honor, it is often not clearly right to encourage when holding undisclosed length in a suit. Users of Smith must decide whether to encourage or discourage with length in advance so as not to introduce a dubious ethical element into the convention's use.