

Second Hand Play (March 22, 2021)

GENERAL RULE: If you are second hand, you should play low unless you have a definite reason for not doing so.

Example 1. Q642

AJ3

South leads the five. You are West. Which card do you play?

Answer: LOW. If you play low, dummy is forced to play the queen. Either your partner will win with the king or, if the queen holds the trick, you now retain the A-J over declarer's king. If you play the ace, then declarer can win tricks with his queen and king, should he hold that card.

Example 2. K642

AJ3

South leads the five. You are West. Which card do you play?

Answer: LOW, unless you suspect South has a singleton and is trying to steal a trick with the king. Usually, declarer makes such a lead early on in the hand before the defenders can get a "count" on his hand.

Example 3. KJ94

A1032

South leads the five. You are West. Which card do you play?

Answer: LOW. If partner has the queen, he should be given a chance to make it. If declarer has the queen, it is useless to come up with the ace, because the declarer will lose only one trick in the suit.

Example 4. A1032

J4

South leads the five. You are West. Which card do you play?

Answer: If West improperly plays the jack hoping “to force the ace”, it will do him no good. You may argue that it will help your partner. This is a wrong argument. It can do your partner good only if he has the king or the queen, in which case he won't need your help. Either the ace comes up or your partner will win the trick.

However, the play of the jack might do your partner a lot of harm if the complete holding is as follows:

A1032

J4

Q76

K985

When South leads the five and West correctly plays low, the defense **MUST** win a trick despite how the declarer plays.

Example 5. AQ1042

K53

J7

986

South leads the six. You are West. Which card do you play?

Answer: Don't play the king to “force out the ace!” You should play **LOW**. With this holding, declarer should take the deep finesse of the 10 (see Hand 1 under the Card Combination section from the March 1st lesson). His ten will lose to your partner's jack. If you play the king, then declarer's queen will drop your partner's jack. And, your side will get **NO** tricks in the suit.

NOTE: Try not to put your honor cards on deuces!

Example 6. A102

QJ6

When South leads a low card, the play of the jack is proper in order to force out the ace. This play will assure your side of a trick. But, if the holding were as follows:

A753

QJ6

Here, it would be improper to play the jack in order to force out the ace. The declarer does not intend to play low. A big danger in playing the jack is that your partner might hold the singleton king.

Finally, you must cover an honor with your honor in the next example. Why?

Example 7. AQxxx

Kxx

10xx

Jx

Answer: West should cover the jack with his king which forces the ace. Declarer can play his queen hoping to drop the 10. If you do not cover the jack, your side will not win any tricks in the suit. However, if you cover the jack with your king, then your partner's 10 will take the third trick in the suit.

You should play high when an honor card is led. For example, if the KQ743 is in the dummy and you hold the A5 and the declarer leads the jack, you should play your ace. If you duck, you will find yourself placing your ace on the deuce the next time!

Example 10 below shows another situation in which second hand should play high. In the case where you have touching honors and the dummy has only one honor, you should “split your honors” to ensure the taking of one trick.

Example 10.

	North	
	A109x	
	West (you)	East
	KQx	?
	South	
	J (?)	

When South leads the jack, you should play the queen (split your honors”). At notrump you will always take at least one trick; however, in a suit contract, declarer may only have two of the suit he is leading. Therefore, it is imperative for you to “split your honors” in order to ensure yourself of one trick in the suit.

GENERAL RULE: Always cover the last EQUAL honor that is being led from the dummy.

Example 11 illustrates this rule.

	North		
	742		Bidding:
	QJ92		S W N E
	A53		1N P 2C P
	K76		2S P 3N P
			P P
	West	East	Opening Lead: Ace of spades
	AKQJ	86	
	1087	K65	
	J987	1042	
	32	109854	
	South		
	10953		
	A43		
	KQ6		
	AQJ		

Analysis of the Hand:

West cashes the first four tricks, dummy discarding a heart and East discarding two clubs. West shifts to a club and declarer cashes three clubs, ending in the dummy. (West should discard a diamond and HOLD onto his hearts.) Why?

Now the queen of hearts is led from dummy. East sees the queen and jack; so, he should follow the rule of covering the LAST equal honor he can see and play low. If the jack is led next, East should now cover. Now, West's ten becomes high. This is the answer to the "Why?" West must not thoughtlessly discard a heart.

NOTE: If East covers the queen, South wins and then finesses dummy's nine on the way back—to lose no heart tricks and make his contract. The main reason for not covering a queen is that the player with the queen also holds the J and 9. By covering prematurely, you expose your partner to a finesse.

GENERAL RULE: When your partner has opened a long suit at notrump, you should win a trick early in order to continue playing your partner's suit while he still has a possible entry with which to cash his long suit.

Example 12.

	North		
	K6		
	8432		
	QJ97		
	K106		
West		East	Contract: 3NT
QJ1085		973	
K105		A96	Opening Lead: Queen of spades
43		10652	
Q97		J84	
	South		
	A42		
	QJ7		
	AK8		
	A532		

Analysis of the Hand:

South becomes the declarer at 3NT. West leads the queen of spades which is won in the dummy with the king. Declarer leads the two of hearts. Here, East should NOT play second hand low. He needs to play the ace and return the seven of spades to clear partner's spade suit in case partner gets in to cash his now good spade suit. East has to hope that West has an entry card. Note the difference if East plays a low heart. The declarer will play his queen. West will have to win with his king of hearts, the only possible entry he has (other than the club queen).

A spade continuance will be refused by the declarer (notice that he saves the ace of spades until East has no more spades left to lead). Now when spades are established, unfortunately, West will have no entry card with which to cash the good spade suit.

The final example is a real test of your developing skills as a defender! Most defenders would not get this one correct. *This hand was taken from Edwin Kantar's Defensive Bridge Play.

Example 13.

North
1072
A832
AKQ2
109

West
KJ93
Q5
1043
5432

East
A65
764
9876
Q76

Bidding: S W N E
1C P 1D P
1H P 4H P
P P

South
Q64
KJ109
J5
AKJ8

Opening Lead: Three of spades

Analysis of the Hand:

West leads the unbid suit. East wins the ace and returns the suit, the defense collecting the first three spade tricks. At trick four West shifts to a small diamond. Declarer wins the jack and plays the jack of hearts. If West is not ready for this play the defense falls apart. West must play low. South will probably rise with the ace and finesse the ten on the way back (his proper percentage play).

Next Week: Preemptive Bidding—Part I