

Third Hand Play—March 15, 2021

The Partner of the opening leader is the **third hand** to play to trick one. He can see the opening lead, the cards in the dummy and in his own hand. Note: Don't forget that the bidding of the hand should always be uppermost in your mind throughout the play of the hand.

General Rule: Third hand usually plays high when partner leads a low card **and** there are no honor cards in dummy.

Example 1.

	North (dummy)	
	943	
West		East (You)
A1082		KJ6
	South	
	Q75	

West leads the deuce (2) of spades against a NT contract. Here East should play the king, NOT the jack. East wins the king and then returns the jack. Now South cannot take a trick in spades. But, if East incorrectly plays the jack at trick one, then South will win with the queen—and possibly, have a leg up on making his contract. He gets a trick he should not have gotten!

Returning Partner's Suit

If East wins the first trick, usually it is correct to return his partner's suit. The card you return will depend on your holding in the suit.

You should lead back your second highest card if you originally held three cards in the suit. In Example 1 above, East won with the king and correctly returned the jack (second highest from three).

You should lead back your fourth highest if you originally held four or more cards in the suit.

If, in Example 1, East had held KQ6, he should play the queen the first time—the lower of two equals. CAUTION: Third hand needs to pay attention to dummy's SPOT cards when considering which card to play.

Example 2.

	North (Dummy)	
	943	
West		East (You)
2		a. J106
		b. J108

In “a”, East plays the 10 (lower of two equals) to the first trick. In “b”, East plays the eight because with the nine appearing in the dummy, the eight is equal to the 10.

NOTE: When your partner leads a small card and there is an honor in the dummy, you must NOT play your honor card; but, rather wait to capture dummy's honor.

Example 3. a.	North (Dummy)	
	Q62	
West		East (You)
5		K103

West leads the five, dummy plays low, you MUST play the 10, not the king. If you play the king, the queen will eventually be established for a trick. If you correctly play the 10, the declarer cannot ever take a trick with the queen.

West leads the two (2) of spades. Dummy plays the 10 and you win the ace. STOP and THINK! It is apparent that it is fruitless to continue with the spade suit; so, you decide to switch to a club. Which is the PROPER card to play?

The answer is the queen because you believe that South has the king. This will force him to win the trick. When your partner regains the lead and comes back with a club, you will win the rest of the tricks in that suit.

Note that if you had led back your fourth best club (8), South will/should play low and North would win with the nine(9). The king of clubs would subsequently produce another trick for the declarer.

The way for East to remember the proper card to lead from this combination is as follows: When you sit over the dummy (that is, the dummy plays before you) and you surround one of dummy's honor cards (in this case your queen and 10 of clubs surround dummy's jack), and you hold another high card, you should lead as though you held AQJ10. Therefore, from your holding in Example 4, the proper lead would be the queen.

UNBLOCKING

Recall from our class on February 15th, the importance of the third hand making certain to UNBLOCK should he hold high cards in the suit his partner has led against a notrump contract. Please reread the section on unblocking from the PDF file. Example 5 below illustrates how very important for East to unblock his honors.

Example 5. North
 A104
 A
 9543
 AJ1043

West
Q753
Q9763
J2
92

East
J86
KJ5
Q1076
K85

How would you bid this hand?

South
K92
10842
AK8
Q76

Contract: 3NT

Opening Lead: 6 of hearts

Play of the Hand:

West leads the six of hearts. The ace is played from the dummy. Here, East should play the jack of hearts and NOT the five. This play serves a dual purpose. It signals to partner that a continuation of the suit is desired; and, more importantly, it starts unblocking for partner who, no doubt, has a five card suit.

Note the difference if East retains the jack of hearts. When he gets in with the king of clubs, he will cash the king of hearts followed by his jack. West cannot afford to overtake—but, if you have correctly retained the five (5), you can then lead through declarer's 10-8 of hearts; thus, setting the contract.

Maintaining Communication With Partner

The next two examples will illustrate how very important it is to maintain communication with your partner.

Example 6.	North 1094 A863 Q102 AJ6		Bidding: S W N E 1S P 1N P 2D P 3S* P 4S P P P
West	K75 K1042 85 9743	East	83 Q975 A943 K85
	South AQJ62 J KJ76 Q102		*shows limit raise with three card spade support Opening lead: 8 of diamonds

Analysis of the Hand: South is declarer at four spades. West leads the eight of diamonds. East should NOT win the first trick. However, he should signal with the nine of diamonds (suggesting to partner that he should continue the suit.)

Note: West has a quick trump entry and smaller trumps. His hand is perfect for making the short-suit lead discussed in the January 25th class (see “Short-Suit Leads.”)

Declarer wins and takes the spade finesse, losing to West's king. Now West is in and has another diamond to lead to his partner's ace. Partner leads back the three of diamonds (suit preference for a club return) for West to obtain a ruff with a small (otherwise useless) spade. West then returns the seven of clubs, hoping his partner will get in with his king of clubs.

LESSON OF THE HAND: When partner of the doubleton leader has an ace of the suit but no other quick entry, he should NOT win the first trick but wait for the second trick to take his ace.

Example 7. North
 J87
 95
 A876
 10987

Bidding: S W N E
 2N P 3N P
 P P

West
 954
 K8763
 43
 J42

East
 10632
 A102
 K95
 K63

Opening Lead: 6 of hearts

South
 AKQ
 QJ4
 QJ102
 AQ5

Analysis of the Hand:

South is declarer at 3NT. West leads the 6 of hearts. East wins the ace and returns the 10, second highest from three. Declarer plays the jack. While West can now win with the king of hearts and clear the suit, he has no outside entry card so that he can cash his remaining two good tricks. NOTE: partner will have no heart left to return to him.

The proper procedure is for West to permit declarer to hold the trick with the jack. One trick must be lost in any event. When East gains the lead with the king of diamonds, he still will have a heart left to return to West so that the setting tricks can now be cashed.

LESSON OF THE HAND: When defender is attempting to establish a suit at notrump, it is important to remember that unless he has an entry to the long suit, it is worthless even when it becomes established. Equally important, his partner must retain (not thoughtlessly discard) a card of that suit in order to get to his partner once his suit is established.



Card Combination

In the following hands, you are missing the ace. How do you play to maximize the number of tricks you can win?

Hand 1. KQ95 Lead twice toward the KQ hoping to make 3 tricks
 if West holds the ace and the suit breaks 3/3.
 432

Hand 2. K1096 It is best to finesse the 10 and then the 9.
 5432

In the next hand, how do you play the following combination?

Hand 3. AQ105 Lead the 9. If it holds, you remain
 in your hand to lead the jack.
 J93

In the next hand, how do you play this suit to try to keep your losses to one trick? Obviously, you have to lose the ace.

Hand 4. Kxxxx
 Qxx

Five cards are out to the AJ109x. You have to hope they are divided 3-2 and that the hand holding only two cards has the ace.

You first try to determine which opponent you believe has the ace. If it is West, then you should lead a low card from your hand toward the king in the dummy. When it holds, you now should lead a small card from the dummy and play LOW from your hand. Hopefully, the ace will fall and your queen will now pull East's remaining card.

If you believe that East holds the ace, then you should lead a low card from the dummy and play the queen. Then, lead a small card from your hand and duck on the board. Hopefully, the ace will fall at this point and your king will pull West's remaining card.

Next Week: Second Hand Play

