

Defence--2nd Hand Play



In this handout on defence, the player on our right will be leading to the trick (either declarer or dummy is leading to the trick). It won't matter if it is a suit contract or No Trumps.

The old saying for defence is: "Second Hand Low, Third Hand High." In general, when playing second to the trick, play low. The major exception is "cover an honour with an honour" (which also has exceptions).

It will be helpful to start with a very common suit combination:

DUMMY	
♠ J 7 6	
	YOU
	♠ K 10 4

If the ♠6 is played from dummy, follow LOW with the ♠4.

But, if the ♠J is led from dummy, cover with the ♠K.

	DUMMY
	♠ J 7 6
YOU	
♠ A 9 2	
	DECLARER
	♠ Q or ♠ 3

If declarer leads low (♠3) from his hand, follow LOW with the ♠2.

But, if the ♠Q is led from declarer, cover with the ♠A.

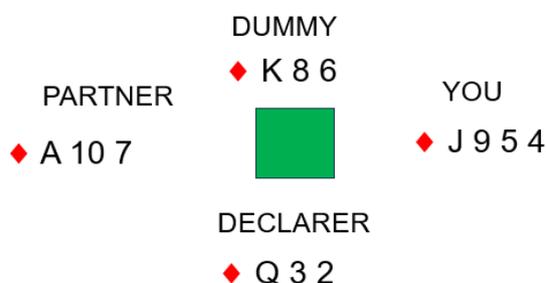
Now let's look at all 4 hands:



If declarer leads this suit from dummy or hand, he should lose 3 tricks. When he leads low from dummy (or hand), the next defender plays low. If declarer leads an honour from either hand, the next defender covers.

This basic premise: "2nd hand low, but cover an honour with an honour" will cover most situations.

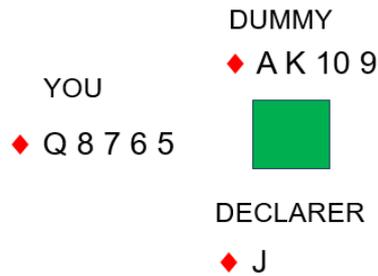
When declarer leads low from either hand, be wary about grabbing an ace when playing second to a trick. Usually, this is a losing play. Your ace will capture "air." Aces are meant to capture higher honours. Also, you often remove a guess; declarer leading up to king-jack (trying to decide who has the ace and who has the queen) will be delighted if you grab your ace, removing the guess. Here is a very typical ace-grab to avoid:



Declarer leads the ♦2. If West grabs the ♦A, you can see what happens. West should play low, and declarer gets only one trick.

If they are in a grand slam contract, then feel free to grab your ace. Every now and then, you will duck an ace and "go to bed with it." That's okay. If you never go to bed with an ace, you are grabbing them too quickly. But 90% of the time, it is wrong to take an ace when playing second to a trick.

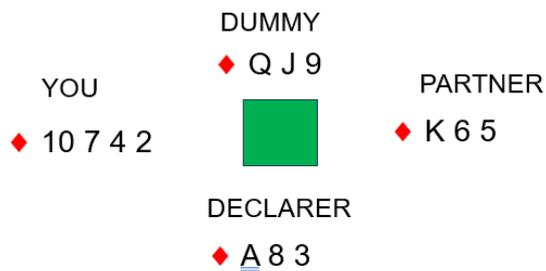
As far as covering an honour with an honour, there are exceptions. Even experts don't always get it right. Here are two common exceptions, worth learning:



When you see the jack from declarer, don't cover. What good could it do? If covering won't promote anything in partner's hand, don't cover.

If dummy had ♦ AK9, then covering is okay (hoping to promote partner's ♦ 10).

The other main exception is: Don't cover the first honour. Cover the second honour. For example:



When dummy's ♦ Q is led, East should NOT cover. If he does, declarer will win the ♦ A and finesse against West's ♦ 10.

After the ♦ Q wins the trick and the ♦ J is led next, East should cover.

Second-hand play is tough, but following the basic rules above should be good enough 90+% of the time.