



## Topics for the Defense



1. **Cover an Honor with an Honor (or Not):** As a defender, you often have to decide whether to cover an honor with an honor. The answer to this question is: Yes, you should cover the honor if doing so may promote a lower card for you or partner.
2. Consider this situation where the queen is led from the dummy:

Dummy

Q 7 3

You

K 10 9

Declarer

A J 8 7 5

Should you cover the queen with your king? Yes, you should cover with your king in order to promote your ten to a third-round trick. If you don't cover, you won't win a single trick.

3. What if you can't see the ten or the nine? Should you still cover the queen with the king?

Dummy

Q 7 3

Partner

10 6 3

You

K 5 4

Declarer

A J 9 8

Yes, because partner might have the ten or the nine. If you cover the queen with the king, partner's ten eventually takes a trick.

4. If you can't promote anything for yourself and partner can't possibly have sufficient length to get a promotion, then don't cover the honor. In this example, the bidding indicates that declarer has a six-card suit. When the jack is led from dummy, should you cover with the queen?

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	J 7 3	
<u>Partner</u>		<u>You</u>
?		Q 5 2
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	??????	

No, don't cover. You have nothing to promote and your partner has a singleton. Furthermore, when declarer's side has a nine card combined holding, declarer may be planning to go up with the ace and king to try to drop the queen.

5. If dummy has a sequence of equal honors, cover the last one in the sequence.

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	Q J 9	
<u>Partner</u>		<u>You</u>
10 8 7 4		K 6 5
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	A 3 2	

If the queen is led from dummy, play low. If you cover, declarer wins and then leads to the nine, finessing you partner out of her ten. The correct play is to cover the jack on the next round. Your partner's ten will now be promoted.

6. **Second Hand Low:** Surely you've heard: "Second Hand Low, Third Hand High." This means that when you're the second one playing to a trick, you should play a low card when you have nothing else to guide you. The reason behind this play is that your partner will be fourth to play and will have an opportunity to win the trick.
7. Consider this situation where declarer leads a low card towards dummy:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	Q 7 3	
<u>You</u>		
A 9 4		
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	2	

Should you play your ace? Only if you can see that it will defeat the contract right now. Otherwise, it's best to follow the guideline and play second hand low, contributing the four to the trick.

First, let's suppose declarer has the king and the whole layout is something like this:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	Q 7 3	
<u>You</u>		<u>Partner</u>
A 9 4		J 10 6 5
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	K 8 2	

If you rise with your ace, declarer will end up with two tricks, one with the queen and one with the king. If you are patient and play second hand low, declarer can win the first trick with dummy's queen but now the king remains trapped by your ace and partner's jack and ten. Declarer will be held to one trick in the suit. Your ace is meant to take declarer's king, not the two. Don't play your ace "on air."

8. How low is low? When declarer leads the two toward dummy in the above example, you may be tempted to play the nine, rather than the four, to encourage declarer to play dummy's queen. There's no need to do this. Declarer is surely not planning to play dummy's seven to try to win the trick. If you waste the nine, it may cost your side a trick later.

9. Playing low can be even more important when declarer has a complete guess to make. Consider this layout:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	K J	
<u>You</u>		<u>Partner</u>
A 9 8 6 2		Q 10 5 4
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	7 3	

When declarer leads a low card toward dummy, you may think it doesn't matter whether or not you play your ace since declarer is always entitled to a trick in the suit with dummy's king. Declarer, however, can't see your cards. If you play second hand low, declarer may think the actual layout is something like this:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	K J	
<u>You</u>		<u>Partner</u>
Q 9 8 6 2		A 10 5 4
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	7 3	

In this layout he should play dummy's jack, taking a finesse against your queen. Since declarer doesn't know which is the actual layout, play second hand low and let declarer do the guesswork.

10. Splitting Honors: Are there any exceptions to Second Hand Low?

- Yes, the most common one is "splitting your honors."
- The situation is something like this:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	A 9 2	
<u>You</u>		<u>Partner</u>
K Q J 5		8 6 2
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	10 7 3	

If declarer leads a low card, it's certainly right to play one of your three equal honors. You're trying to prevent declarer from winning a trick cheaply with the nine.

11. **Anything else?**

- Yes, there is the case where the first hand leads an honor or an intermediate card rather than a low card.

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	A 9 2	
<u>You</u>		<u>Partner</u>
K 6 5		? ? ?
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	Q ? ?	

If declarer leads the queen, the Second Hand Low rule is out the window. The guideline instead is To Cover an Honor with an Honor. Remember—it's right to cover that queen with your king if it might promote a card for your side.

12. **Third Hand High:** “Second Hand Low, Third Hand High”. In general, when partner leads a low card and dummy holds only low cards, you should play your highest card in an attempt to win the trick.

13. Consider the following situation where partner leads a low card and dummy plays a low card:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	7 6 3	
<u>Partner</u>		<u>You</u>
2		K 4 2

Should you play your king? Yes, for a couple of reasons. You would like to win the trick for your side. If partner happens to have led away from the ace (tsk!), then your king will win the trick. But even if declarer wins your king with the ace, all is not lost. By playing your king and driving out the ace, you are promoting partner's queen or jack to eventual winners.

14. How about this situation, where you hold two honors:

	<u>Dummy</u> 7 6 3	
<u>Partner</u> 2		<u>You</u> K 10 5

By all means, play the king. You can't lose and you will gain a trick if declarer holds something like Q 8 4 or even A J 4. If declarer started with A Q 4, your king is always subject to being finessed, so you may as well play it now.

15. You want to play third hand high, but only as high as necessary. If you have touching honors, play the lowest one in the sequence. This will give valuable information to partner. For example,

	<u>Dummy</u> 7 6 3	
<u>Partner</u> 2		<u>You</u> Q J 10 4

You should play the ten, the lowest card in your sequence. When partner sees declarer win this trick with the ace, he will be able to place the queen and jack in your hand.

Principle: Lead to a trick from the top of a sequence, but follow (in third chair) from the bottom of a sequence.

16. Another situation in which you want to play only as high as necessary is one like this:

	<u>Dummy</u> Q 5	
<u>Partner</u> 3		<u>You</u> K J 8 4
	<u>Declarer</u> A 10	

If declarer plays a low card from dummy, you will play your jack rather than your king. You have the queen surrounded, so in effect you are finessing the jack. Remember to look at the dummy before deciding on your play.

17. Third hand high? How high should we play in this example?

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	Q 7 2	
<u>Partner</u>		<u>You</u>
3		K 10 4

It depends who hold the jack and who holds the ace. If partner holds them both, then playing the ten will be good enough and it will also keep dummy's queen trapped by your king. If partner holds the jack and declarer has the ace, then again playing the ten works better than playing the king. If the complete layout is like this:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	Q 7 2	
<u>Partner</u>		<u>You</u>
J 9 6 3		K 10 4
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	A 8 5	

Then playing the ten forces declarer's ace and they only get one trick in the suit. If you play the king, they'll get two tricks.

**Principle:** If partner leads a low card and dummy has an honor and it is not played, if you have a higher honor and your second best card is the nine or higher, play your second best card

18. What if partner leads a jack or a ten or a nine? Should you play third hand high? It depends. If dummy has only small cards, it's right to play third hand high. After all, partner may have led the top of an interior sequence. Consider this situation where partner leads the jack and dummy plays a low card:

	<u>Dummy</u>	
	7 6 3	
<u>Partner</u>		<u>You</u>
A J 10 9		K 8 2
	<u>Declarer</u>	
	Q 5 4	

You should play your king, then return the eight. You will trap declarer's queen.