

BRIDGE – INTERMEDIATE LESSONS II – 10

Second Hand Play

General Comments on Second Hand Play: The Defender who is second to play when Declarer leads from either hand has a very important role. To be a successful Defender, it is crucial to learn the techniques explained in this lesson. Declarer has led a card from his/her hand or from Dummy. You, second in position to the lead, must decide whether to play high or low. Most of the time, the second hand Player plays low allowing his/her Partner, who plays last to the trick, to try to win the trick as cheaply as possible. A popular maxim, “**Second hand plays low**”, sets forth the idea that there is no need to waste your high card on one of Declarer’s low cards; better to wait until Declarer plays a high card which you can then capture. The object is to force third hand (Declarer or Dummy) to waste a high card, with forth hand (Partner) having the opportunity to capture that card with an even higher one. On the other hand, if Declarer plays an honor, another maxim, “**Cover an honor with an honor**,” more likely applies. When to administer these principals is most useful when considering second hand play. One must consider the conditions under which they arise as well as their exceptions.

A. When Declarer Leads a Small Card: Defender’s high cards are best utilized not only when they take a trick, but additionally when they can be preserved to capture one of Declarer’s high cards at the same time. An old bridge adage proclaims, “**Aces are meant to take Kings, Kings are meant to take Queens; etc.**” For this reason, if Declarer plays a small card, it usually works out best for the Player in second position to also play a small card. By playing second hand low you usually make your side’s best effort to conserve its high cards so that they not only take tricks but also capture the Opponent’s high cards at the same time, later during the play of the hand.

B. When Dummy Leads a Small Card: When a small card is first played from Declarer, the second hand has the advantage of seeing the cards in the Dummy such that the decision as to what to play is often assisted by this advantage. When a small card is led from Dummy, however, this advantage does not exist for the second hand Player since Declarer’s hand is concealed. The concept of second hand playing low, however, is still applicable and, indeed, still effective.

Principle # 1: As second hand, do not try to win the trick unless there is a strategic reason to gain the lead. Whether a small card is led from Declarer’s hand or from Dummy, it is usually best for second hand to play low thus conserving the Defenders’ high cards. Partner plays last so you usually do not have to worry about Declarer winning the trick too cheaply.

C. When Dummy Leads a High Card: Here, the second hand has the advantage of seeing the cards in the Dummy such that the decision as to what to play is assisted by this advantage. If Declarer leads an honor from Dummy, it is often correct to cover with a higher honor.

(a) If you hold **two cards above the honor led**, always cover, and play your **highest** card unless the second highest will do the job.

(b) If you hold **only one card above the honor led**, **cover if the honor led is unsupported**, but **do not cover a touching honors**, in the latter circumstance, you should usually cover the **second** honor.

Exceptions:

Previously we have observed that when Declarer leads a small card, it is generally good advice for second hand to play low. There are, however, several exceptions to this general principle.

A. Splitting Honors: The first exception deals with the play of the lowest of several cards in sequence or in nearly-sequenced relationship in order to stop Declarer from winning a trick to which he/she would otherwise not be entitled. This is called “splitting honors”, and this principle takes precedence over the normal “second-hand-low” maxim.

Principle # 2: When holding touching honors, split your honors on defense rather than play second hand low. It will ensure that your team gets all the tricks to which you are entitled. On the other hand, if there are no tricks for you to promote for your side, or if it may cost you a trick to split your honors, revert to the general principle of playing second hand low.

B. Covering Honors: The second exception where a Defender, in second position, does *not* play low occurs when Declarer plays a high card. Now the guideline of “Covering an honor with an honor” comes into play; i.e., playing a high card on top of Declarer’s high card in order to promote your side’s lower cards. In bridge terminology the term “honor” normally refers to the Ace through the Ten of a suit. In this lesson, however, it should also include the nine, as well, because it is an important card in the play of many card combinations.

Exercise 1

In each of the following layouts, how many tricks will Declarer get if you cover the Queen played from Dummy, and how many, if you do not cover?

<p><u>DUMMY</u> Q65</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>YOU</u> 7432</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>PARTNER</u> KJT</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u> A98</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">1, 2</td> </tr> </table>	<u>YOU</u> 7432	<u>PARTNER</u> KJT	<u>DECLARER</u> A98		1, 2		<p><u>DUMMY</u> Q65</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>YOU</u> JT74</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>PARTNER</u> K32</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u> A98</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">1, 2</td> </tr> </table>	<u>YOU</u> JT74	<u>PARTNER</u> K32	<u>DECLARER</u> A98		1, 2		<p><u>DUMMY</u> Q65</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>YOU</u> T874</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>PARTNER</u> K32</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u> AJ9</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">2, 3</td> </tr> </table>	<u>YOU</u> T874	<u>PARTNER</u> K32	<u>DECLARER</u> AJ9		2, 3	
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Exception

If the bidding indicates that Partner has a singleton or void in the suit led by Declarer (common in the Trump suit), the rules in this lesson do not apply. You should cover or split honors only if it will benefit your own hand. Good Defenders do their thinking about whether or not to cover an honor *before* Declarer actually leads the suit. This way they can play in tempo and not give away the location of a high card by huddling over what to do.

C. Covering Second Honors: The third, and last, exception, deals with the situation in which there are a couple of touching high cards from which Declarer has led. In this instance, it is usually best to wait until the last high card is led before covering.

Exercise 2

In the following examples should you cover the first honor led from Dummy or not?

<p><u>DUMMY</u> JT8</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>PARTNER</u> Q97</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>YOU</u> K642</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u> A53</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">No</td> </tr> </table>	<u>PARTNER</u> Q97	<u>YOU</u> K642	<u>DECLARER</u> A53		No		<p><u>DUMMY</u> JT3</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>PARTNER</u> K762</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>YOU</u> Q95</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u> A84</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">No</td> </tr> </table>	<u>PARTNER</u> K762	<u>YOU</u> Q95	<u>DECLARER</u> A84		No		<p><u>DUMMY</u> JT3</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>PARTNER</u> 7654</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><u>YOU</u> KQ9</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><u>DECLARER</u> A82</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Yes</td> </tr> </table>	<u>PARTNER</u> 7654	<u>YOU</u> KQ9	<u>DECLARER</u> A82		Yes	
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