

SECOND HAND PLAY

ABOUT THE DEALS

South will always be declarer and you may be either East or West.

Feel free to disagree with the bidding which is more or less Standard American, not 2-Over-1.

The first page of each Deal shows your hand, dummy's hand, and the play up to this point. You are asked to study the information available and decide what you would play. When you have decided click **NEXT**.

The next page shows all four hands.

SECOND HAND LESSON

You should recall that the primary guideline from the Third Hand lesson was that

Third hand should usually play a high card.

It won't surprise you that when you are Second Hand, playing immediately after Declarer or dummy has led a card to a trick, the guideline is just the opposite.

When Declarer or dummy leads a low card
the next player should usually play low.

It's called Second-hand-low and Bridge teachers have been saying it for ages.

Of course it isn't ALWAYS the best play, but many times it is.

Here are some examples to illustrate why Second-hand-low is usually correct.

♠ Q 5 3

You are West, defending against 3NT, and at some point South leads the ♠4.

♠ K 9 7 2

♠ J 8 4

♦ A 10 6

If you play your ♠K South will play a low ♠ from dummy, and later will be able to use the ♠Q and ♠J to create a ♠ winner.

If you play a low ♠ instead, East can beat dummy's ♠Q and South can never make a ♠ winner at all.

♥ Q 5 3

This time you are East, and the ♥3 is led from dummy. If you play your ♥A South will then have two winners, the ♥K and the ♥Q.

♥ J 9 7 4

♥ K 8 6

♦ A 10 2

If you play low to this trick and save your ♥A to capture dummy's ♥Q you will hold Declarer to one trick in the suit.

Of course Bridge isn't so cut and dried that a little rule like Second-hand-low will always be the right course of action.

The next two examples show a problem you will face frequently.

♦ Q 2
♦ K 8 7 5 [redacted] ♦ A 10 9 4
♦ J 6 3

You are West, defending against a ♠ contract. At some point South plays the ♦3. If you go up with the ♦K South will be able to establish a ♦ winner with the ♦ Queen/Jack combination. So here you should play low and South cannot win a single ♦ trick.

Compare this with the last example.

♦ Q 2
♦ K 8 7 5 [redacted] ♦ J 10 9 4
♦ A 6 3

Again, South plays the ♦3 from his hand. This time you had better go up or South will win with dummy's ♦Q and will not have a ♦ loser at all!

The problem is that from West's point of view the two deals appear identical (cover the East and South hands).

Perhaps West can get an idea which way to play based on the bidding, or perhaps South's play up to this point. If not he just has to guess whether to play high or low.

Splitting Honors

When you hold touching honors and you are playing before a higher honor in dummy you will have to decide whether or not to split your honors.

♣ A 10 5
♣ Q J 8 2 [redacted] ♣ 7 6 3
♣ K 9 4

South leads the ♣4 toward dummy and it is your play. If your partner has the ♣K then it doesn't matter what card you play. South will only get one trick in this suit no matter what.

But if South has the ♣K he may decide to finesse dummy's ♣10 if you play a low card, and he could win a third trick in the suit. To make sure that doesn't happen you play your ♣J (or ♣Q), splitting your honors and forcing dummy's ♣A. After this your other ♣ honor will be behind South's ♣K and will be good for one trick.

Now switch yourself to East and see how it looks.

♣ 7 6 3

South leads dummy's ♣3 toward toward his hand and it is your play.

♣ 9 5 4



♣ Q J 8 2

♣ A K 10

You may think you should split your honors this time too, but that will only help South.

If he wants to finesse his ♣10 there is nothing you can do about it. But for all you know he may plan to play a high honor, and if you put on one of your honors he may well figure out that you have both the ♣Q and ♣J. If so, he will later finesse your other honor.

So here you should play a low card.

Do not split your honors unless you can tell from the cards you can see that it will ensure you win a trick.

Covering Honors

Another type of decision faces the defender in Second Hand when Declarer or dummy leads an Honor card.

The old guideline "Cover an Honor with an Honor" is usually correct.

♠ J 9 6

You are East and South leads the ♠J from dummy.

♠ 10 8 3 2



♠ K 7 4

♠ A Q 5

If you DO NOT play your ♠K South will play low and win the trick. He will then play another ♠ and finesse with his ♠Q and win all three ♠ tricks.

But if you cover the ♠J. with your ♠K South will have to play the ♠A to win the trick. He can also win the ♠Q but West will be able to take the third trick with the ♠10.

When Declarer leads one of touching honors from dummy the situation changes.

♥ Q J 9

You are East and the ♥Q is led from dummy.
Should you cover or not?

♥ 10 8 6 3



♥ K 5 2

♥ A 7 4

First suppose you cover with your ♥K. South will win his ♥A, and then will play a low ♥ toward dummy's ♥ J 9 and finesse West's ♥10. Played this way South will make three tricks.

Next suppose you DO NOT cover the ♥Q. South will also play low and the ♥Q will win the trick. If the ♥J is played next, you cover and when South takes the ♥A West's ♥10 will become a winner. Played this way South will only make two tricks in the suit.

Of course if the second play is a low ♥ rather than the ♥J, you would withhold your ♥K.

You should usually cover the lead of a single Honor.

If one of touching Honors is played it is usually best to only cover the final Honor in the sequence.

You have probably noticed that all these cute little guidelines have a lot of "usually"s thrown in. The practice Deals will include many of the exceptions to the rule.

When Dummy has a Singleton: . . .

(. . . do you play your Ace?)

The knee-jerk answer is of course YES!

If you fail to take your Ace, Declarer might win his King and never lose a trick in the suit.

Look at some examples where the knee-jerk answer is wrong.

You're East, defending against a ♠ contract and South leads the ♦6 from dummy.

♦ 6

South might not even have the ♦K, as in this hand. If you jump up with your ♦A, South will certainly lose the one ♦ trick that he was expecting to lose.

♦ K 9 8 5



♦ A 10 7 6 4

But now South still has the ♦ Q J which he can use to catch West in a Ruffing finesse. South will establish one of those cards for an extra winner.

♦ Q J 3

If you correctly play a low ♦ South will have to play his ♦J (or Q), and West will take the ♦K. But now, with you rather than West holding the high ♦, South cannot pull off the Ruffing finesse.

You're East, defending against a ♠ contract and South leads the ♦6 from dummy.

♦ 6

This time South DOES have the ♦K. If you jump up with your ♦A, South will certainly lose the one ♦ trick that he was expecting to lose, but he will still have the ♦K to discard a dummy-loser on.

♦ Q 9 8 5 3



♦ A 10 7 6 4

What if you play a low ♦?

South could now play his ♦K and avoid a loser in the suit.

But is that what he will do, or will he play the ♦J, thinking that West must hold the ♦A?.

Who knows?, but if you play low SMOOTHLY, without

♦ K J

fiddling about, he is more likely to play the ♦J which your partner can win.

When dummy leads a singleton, and you are next to play it is usually best to refrain from playing your Ace.

Second Hand High:

Although Second Hand should play low most of the time, there are some exceptions.
For example:

♠ 7 4
♥ 10 8 2
♦ A K Q J 9 5
♣ A 5

♠ A Q 9 6 2
♥ 7 5 4
♦ 6 4
♣ Q 6 4

♠ K 5 3
♥ K Q J
♦ 8 7
♣ 9 8 7 3 2

♠ J 10 8
♥ A 9 6 3
♦ 10 3 2
♣ K J 10

You are East and South is playing 3NT.
West leads the ♠6, you play the ♠10 and South wins his ♠K.

South now goes over to dummy with a high ♦ and then plays the ♥10.

You must play your ♥A immediately. Dummy has 7 easy winners and South has already taken one trick. If he has the ♥K that will be trick number 9.

Besides, from the Rule of Eleven you should know that South only had one high ♠, and he used it to win the first trick. So West's ♠ suit is ready to run. You grab the ♥A and play ♠s.

There are at least 2000 more words to be said about Second Hand play, but . . .
. . . wouldn't 20 Practice Deals be more worthwhile?

Deal 1