

THIRD HAND PLAY

ABOUT THE DEALS

South will always be declarer and you will be in the East position.
Partner has made the opening lead, declarer has played from dummy and it will be your turn to play.

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, the opening lead and the bidding.

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.

THIRD HAND LESSON

If your only ambition is to be a better-than-average defender then you don't have to read this entire lesson.

Instead, just learn this one simple rule and you will be about 75% of good.

When partner's opening lead is a low card and dummy holds no high cards in the suit you should always play your highest card.

That's it. It's called Third Hand High and Bridge teachers have been stressing it for many years.

The idea is that you don't want declarer to win the first trick with a small card. If your high card wins the trick, fine, but if not you want to force Declarer to use a high card to get the trick.

Here are a couple of examples.

	♠ 8 5 3		Defending against a Notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♠4. If you correctly play your ♠A and then return your ♠6 your side will take the first 5 ♠ tricks. If you do not play the ♠A on this trick declarer will win an undeserved trick, perhaps the extra one he needs to make the contract.
♠ K J 7 4 2		♠ A 6	
	♠ Q 10 9		

	♥ 7 5		Defending against a ♠ contract your partner, West, leads the ♥3. You are certain that South holds the ♥A because partner would not underlead an Ace as the opening lead against a suit contract. However, the lead of a low card does indicate an honor in the suit, so to protect that honor you must put your ♥K on the trick. If you get cheap and decide to save your ♥K for later South will win the first trick with the ♥J and in fact won't lose a ♥ trick at all.
♥ Q 10 8 3	[redacted]	♥ K 9 4 2	
	♥ A J 6		

There you have it. Play Third-hand-high and you will be a pretty darn good defender. But if you want to be an excellent defender, (and for times when you do not play Third-hand-high), read on.

What to play when you have touching high cards:

There is a very good common sense rule that is used most of the time in Bridge.

When leading one of equal honors, start with the highest one.
When playing third hand one of equal honors, play the lowest one.

	♦ 8 3 2		Defending against a Notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♦5. You want to play third-hand-high, but that doesn't mean you should put on the ♦Q. Since you also have the ♦J, that is the card you should play. It may seem that it wouldn't matter, and of course it doesn't matter TO YOU . But put yourself on partner's side of the table. If you play the ♦Q and South wins with the ♦A, West cannot tell where the ♦J is, and will assume that South holds it. But if you correctly play the ♦J and South wins with the ♦A partner will know for sure that you also hold the ♦Q, since if South held that card he would not have used his ♦A to win the trick.
♦ K 10 7 5	[redacted]	♦ Q J 4	
	♦ A 9 6		

Here is an obvious extension of that last example.

	♦ J 3 2		Defending against a Notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♦5. Dummy plays low and you want to play third-hand-high, but that doesn't mean you should put on the ♦Q. Since dummy has the ♦J, your ♦Q and ♦10 are equals so you play the ♦10.
♦ K 8 7 5		♦ Q 10 4	
	♦ A 9 6		

What if dummy has a high card:

When dummy comes down with a high card that you can beat it is often better to keep your winner to quash the high card in dummy.

	♣ Q 7 5		Defending against a Notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♣3. Declarer plays the ♣5 from dummy. In this example you can see that playing third-hand-high would be a mistake. Partner's low ♣ lead indicates he holds an honor, which might be the King. If you play your ♣A on this trick partner's ♣K will also win a trick but the third trick in the suit will be taken by dummy's ♣Q. Instead play your ♣J and your side can take the first four tricks. In case you're worried that South might hold the ♣K then quit worrying. If he does hold the ♣K and you put your ♣A on the trick then you will have established TWO ♣ winners for him. Play the ♣J and keep your ♣A to stop dummy's ♣Q from being a winner.
♣ K 9 8 3		♣ A J 2	
	♣ 10 6 4		

	♠ J 5 3		Defending against a Suit contract your partner, West, leads the ♠2. (Remember, partner would NOT underlead an Ace as the opening lead in a suit contract.) You should play the ♠9 because if
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♠ Q 10 7 2		♠ K 9 6	you play your ♠K South will win the ♠A and later make a second trick in the suit by leading toward the ♠J. If this is a Notrump contract the situation is more difficult because against Notrump partner might have led from ♠ A Q 7 2. So against Notrump you use your best judgement (based on the bidding) as to which is more likely for West; ♠ A Q 7 2 or ♠ Q 10 7 2.
	♠ A 8 7		

The Rule of Eleven

When partner makes an opening lead that is fourth-highest, subtract the value of that card from eleven. The result will be the number of cards in dummy, your hand, and declarer's hand that are higher than the card led.

If you want to know more about this rule there is a full lesson on BakerBridge. Meanwhile, here are a couple of examples:

	♥ K 7 2		West leads the ♥6, which you take to be fourth-highest. The ♥2 is played from dummy. Subtract 11 - 6 and the answer is 5, the number of cards in North, East and South that are higher than the ♥6. Since you can see all five of those cards in your hand and dummy, you play low and West's ♥6 will hold the trick. Notice that declarer would have been better off to cover the ♥6 with dummy's ♥7.
♥ Q 10 8 6		♥ A J 9 2	
	♥ 5 4		

	♦ Q 9 4		Defending against a Notrump contract after South has shown opening hand strength, your partner, West, leads the ♦5 and the ♦4 is played from dummy. You apply the Rule of Eleven; 11 - 5 = 6. Since you can see 5 of the ♦s that are above the 5, you know that South has just one card that can beat the ♦5. It is very likely that this card is the ♦K, and while you cannot prevent it from winning a trick you can force South to play it just by

♦ 10 8 7 5		♦ A J 6	playing the ♦6. If you incorrectly play the ♦J South will win with the ♦K and then score a second ♦ trick by finessing the ♦9 later.
	♦ K 3 2		

When partner leads an honor card:

Partner will lead the top card of an honor sequence so you should be able to figure out his holding.

Your first concern here is probably whether to signal for him to continue the suit or not. Another concern, though, is whether you have a high honor yourself that may cause the suit to be blocked.

♣ 8 5 3			Defending against a Notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♣Q. Declarer plays the ♣3 from dummy. If you decide to play low, (since partner's ♣Q is equal to your ♣K), South will most likely hold up his ♣A. When West continues the suit and your ♣K is played, South will hold up again. Since you are now out of ♣s you will be unable to continue to attack in what is probably your side's best suit. Instead, you should play your ♣K. Now if South holds up you can continue the suit and if South continues to hold up West will be able to establish the rest of his ♣s.
♣ Q J 10 7 4		♣ K 2	

Here is an extension of that principle.

♣ A 5 3			Defending against a Notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♣Q. Declarer plays the ♣A from dummy. If you decide to hoard your ♣K and play low, then when your side gains the lead again the ♣ suit will be blocked by your King. You should unblock by playing the ♣K underneath dummy's ♣A. Now, whenever your side gets the lead the attack on the ♣ suit can be continued.
♣ Q J 10 7 4		♣ K 2	

It may happen that partner leads an honor card and you have a higher honor in the suit. Generally you would not want to waste two high-cards on the same trick, but there may be a pressing reason for you to do so.

	♠ J ♥ 8 2		Defending against 6♣, your partner, West, leads the ♠K. North's singleton means your side will only get 1 ♠ trick, so your ♠A is essentially wasted. You want to try to establish a ♥ winner, and the easiest way to make sure ♥s are led next is to do it yourself. So overtake partner's ♠K with your ♠A and play the ♥K.
♠ K Q 9 8 2 ♥ 10 9 6 5		♠ A 10 6 4 ♥ K Q 7 4	
	♠ 7 5 3 ♥ A J 3		

There is a lot more that could be said about Third Hand play, but
. . . 20 Practice Deals should be better than another 2000 words.

Deal 1