

# Crocs on Defence

by Stephen Kennedy

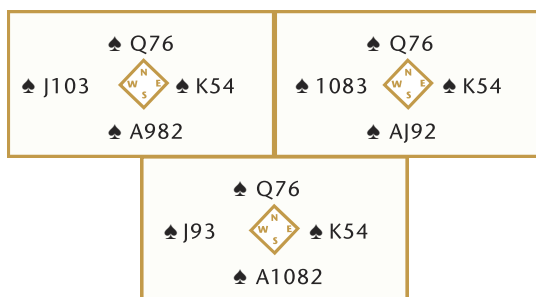


## When to Cover with an Honour

You may have heard the phrase: 'Cover an honour with an honour'. It has existed almost longer than bridge itself. And for good reason.

The idea is simple. When declarer (or dummy) plays an honour, you should play a higher honour on top of it if you can. Don't believe me?

Let's say declarer has Q76 in dummy and you have K54. Declarer calls for the queen, and you have a choice of playing low or covering with your honour (the king). Obviously, it doesn't really matter what we do if declarer has something like J10xx, so let's assume he has the ace:

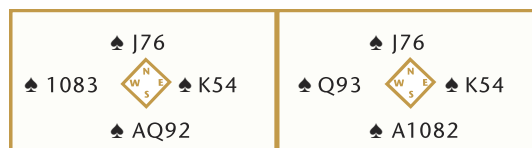


In the first example, it is pretty clear what will happen if you fail to cover. The queen will run round to partner, and he will be unable to beat it. The king is the only card that can beat the queen, so you have to be the one to play it. Of course, declarer is unlikely to run the queen with only the ace in hand. He is far more likely to play towards the queen, winning when West has the king.

Declarer has a stronger suit in the second example, but it is still just as right to cover. If you don't cover, declarer will play a spade to the jack on the second round, finessing your king and leaving you without a trick. But if you cover with the king, declarer will take the ace and may still try a later finesse with a spade to the nine, but partner's ten will be good enough.

Something similar happens in the third example. But this time, partner will score two tricks when declarer tries a finesse.

Clearly, covering the queen is correct, and you may think that this only works because the king is a single rank higher than the queen. But I can assure you that it is equally right to cover when declarer plays a lower honour:

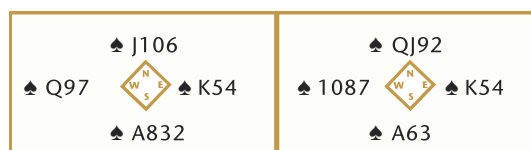


The first example is practically the same as one of the ones from earlier. And so is the second one but with a different coat of paint. If you fail to cover in the second example, partner will score the queen, but your king will fall to a finesse the next time declarer gets in. If you cover, partner's queen *and* nine will hang over declarer's ten and eight.

Those who follow my series may recall that I once wrote an article on *Second Hand Low*. In that article I advised playing low when you are second to play. This is because you want to save your high cards for when it matters.

However, covering an honour with an honour is exactly that. You aren't wasting your high cards if you're using them to beat your opponent's cards and you would be wasting them if they simply get lost in finesses a couple of tricks later.

Does this mean it's always right to cover? Well. This is the game of bridge we're talking about. . .



If you cover the jack, bad things will happen. Declarer will beat your king with the ace and then take a finesse against the queen by leading a low spade towards the ten remaining in dummy. Partner can take their queen, but that will be the only trick for the defence.

Consider what will happen if you refuse to cover. Declarer will have no choice but to play low and partner will score the queen. And then what will declarer do? Your king hangs over dummy's ten, and partner's nine does the same for declarer's eight. There is no longer a winning finesse for declarer to take, and the defence will come to two tricks in the suit.

Something similar will happen if you cover the queen in the second example. Declarer will beat your king with the ace, and a finesse against partner's ten will appear.

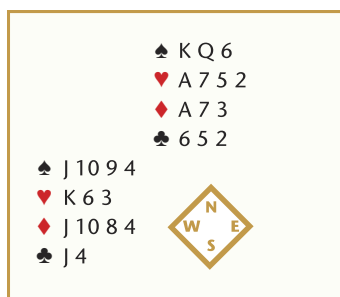
### SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The difference is that in this case, declarer has not led an honour from the dummy. He has led the first of touching honours. This may seem insignificant, but it makes all the difference. If you cover too quickly, you may open your partner up to a finesse.

### TO SUMMARISE

- ♣ Always cover an honour with an honour. Unless it is the first of touching honours, in which case cover the last honour.

Catchy right? Obviously, you'll never forget it. That being said, it may be difficult to implement at the table:



W	N	E	S
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
<sup>1</sup> 1NT=12-14			

A simple auction calls for a simple lead. Declarer takes your ♠J lead in hand with the ace and immediately places the ♥J on the table.

Suddenly, things are not so simple.

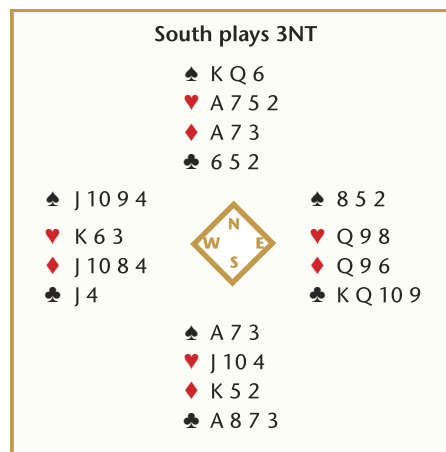
We just spent an entire article figuring out when to cover, and now we're back in the dark. Since declarer's hand is hidden, we don't know if this is the first of touching honours or if it is unsupported.

But we do know something else: we know how many honours there are in the dummy. And this is useful because it allows us to place the cards in declarer's hand.

Since there is only one honour in dummy, does it make sense for declarer to lead an unsupported honour out of hand? The answer is no. If declarer has Jxx, there is no advantage to starting with the jack. The same is true with Qxx. Declarer would play a low heart towards the queen and not risk a cover. So, if declarer leads an honour from hand, you should look at the number of honours in the dummy.

- ♣ If there is only one honour in dummy: do not cover.
- ♣ If there are two honours in dummy: cover.

If you follow these rules, you will defend accurately in more cases than not, and as it happens, you will defend accurately on this hand as well. Here's the full deal:



Of course, this will not always be correct. But that is what future articles are for. □