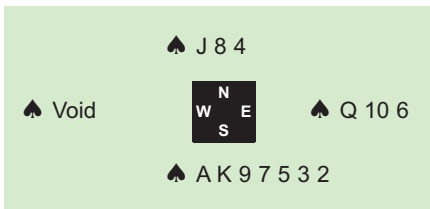


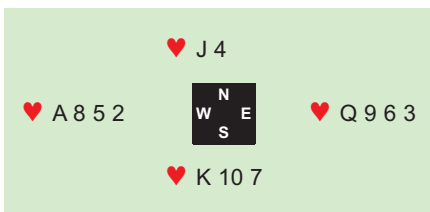
Covering Honours Continued



In BRIDGE 64 we considered what to do if declarer (or dummy) led a high card that you could beat. Overall it came out that you stood to gain more by covering than not – especially if you could see a lower honour or intermediate in your hand.

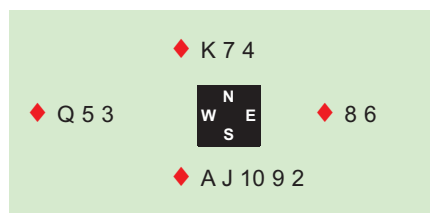


Here declarer leads the jack from dummy, not with any intention of running it but simply to give the opposition the chance to err. If, as East, you suspect that South has a seven-card suit, you want to duck as smoothly as possible.

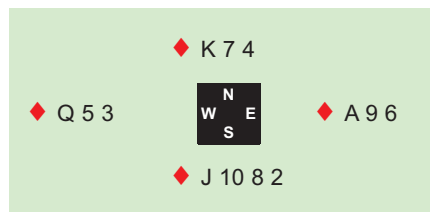


Whether, as East, you want to cover depends upon what your objectives are. If this is a side suit, dummy has spare trumps and you need two heart tricks to defeat the contract, then undoubtedly you should let the jack ride. If you mistakenly cover, declarer will avoid two heart losers whenever you hold either the ace or the queen by following the simple strategy of leading the jack towards the king. However, if you can see a way to defeat the contract without two heart tricks but cannot afford the declarer to make them, then you should cover. This will avoid the possibility that the jack drives out partner's ace (as

the cards lie) or the king (if South has A-10-x), leaving declarer with a tenace behind your queen for the second round.



Moving across to the West seat you need to be familiar with this position. If declarer leads the jack, you must not cover with the queen. Moreover, it is important that you do not even think of doing so. Declarer's plan, unless the bidding or your hesitation marks you with the queen, is to lead the jack to the king and finesse on the way back.



This layout illustrates that there can also be technical reasons for letting the jack run. Partner can either win or duck to leave the suit frozen and declarer unable to make three tricks in this diamond suit. Conversely, an ill-advised cover on the first round would make the 10-8 a tenace for the second.

You may have noticed that covering a touching honour (i.e. when the player leading an honour holds the next lower-ranked card) stands less chance of success than covering an unsupported honour. When the lead comes from dummy you will be able to tell whether there is a touching honour situation but

it is trickier when declarer does so; even then you can think whether it would be logical for declarer to be leading a lone honour rather than a low card. A good general rule, unless you have two higher honours yourself, is to cover the last of touching honours.

Here is another example.



If South leads the jack, West must duck. Playing the queen would allow declarer to take it in dummy with the ace and play back to the ten.

Entries

The entry situation often has a bearing on the correct way to defend. Suppose that on the next layout dummy is short of entries and the bidding marks South with a five-card spade suit.



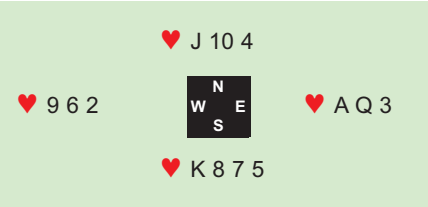
Imagine firstly that East covers the queen with the king. In this case, the ace wins, and then West shows out when declarer crosses to the ten, leaving a marked finesse against your nine. The upshot is that even if dummy has no more entries declarer can make five spade tricks without loss. Now try the effect of letting the queen win and covering the ten on the second round. West shows out, exposing the finesse position as before, but now declarer would need a side entry to dummy to take advantage of it.



Continued on page 25 ►

POTTAGE ON DEFENCE continued from page 24

Here East has two honours higher than dummy and it will usually be right for East to play the ace on the jack. This way declarer will need to expend a side entry to dummy to repeat the finesse.



If this were actually the layout, playing the ace on the jack would gain not just a tempo but a trick. Note that covering with the queen would not be good enough. Declarer would win with the king and run the eight next to pick up West's nine.

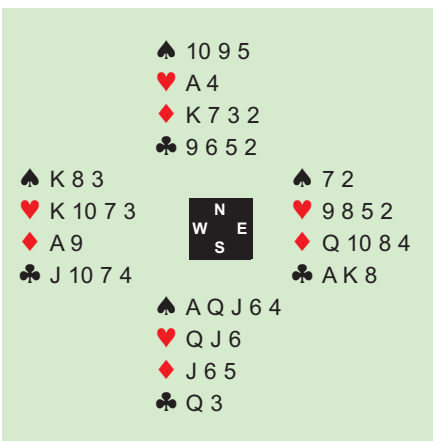
Full Deals

The time has come to consider some full deals. Please try, if you can, to identify the honours in dummy that you might want to cover (if dummy lies on your right) or the cards declarer might lead towards dummy (if dummy lies on your left). Remember, if you need to duck, it may be crucial to duck smoothly.

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♠	End	1♠

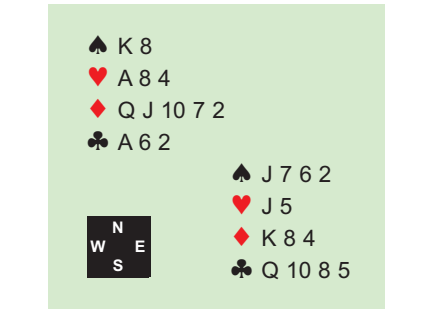
You lead the jack of clubs, which partner wins with the king to switch to a trump. Your king wins and declarer wins the second spade in hand before leading the queen of hearts. Do you cover?

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With the ten of hearts in your hand, you do not need to fear the situation that declarer has Q-J-9. Even if you cover, your opponent surely cannot make more than two heart tricks. It therefore seems you should cover in case East has the heart jack. Well, desperate people do desperate things and maybe South has led an unsupported queen of hearts, but the odds are surely against this.

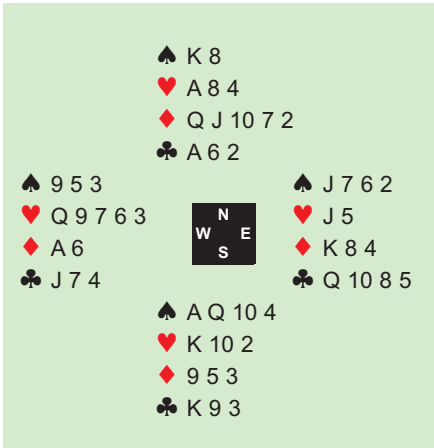
What happens if you let the queen of hearts hold? After this wins the first round of hearts and dummy's ace the second, how can declarer get back to hand to take a heart ruff? You have the ace of diamonds and a trump to lead and partner must hold the ace of clubs and a diamond to lead to you. It is a different story if you cover: declarer wins the second round in hand and scores the vital heart ruff on the next trick.



West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	End	1NT ¹
¹ 12-14 HCP			

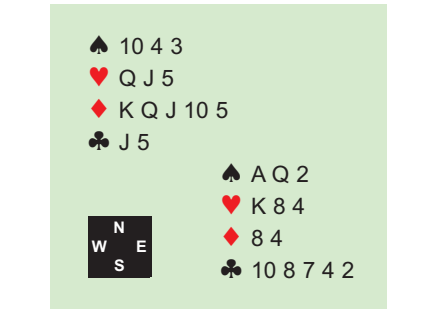
Partner leads the six of hearts (fourth highest, presumably) and your jack loses to the king. Declarer, a good player, plays a spade to the king and then calls for the queen of diamonds.

Do you cover?



Considering the diamonds in isolation, it cannot gain a trick to cover but it could easily lose one – if South has a doubleton ace or West has the singleton ace. On this basis, it looks like a good idea to duck. The snag is that, as the cards lie, West wins the first or second round of diamonds and is unable to continue hearts. Even if you trade the nine and ten of hearts, it is no good letting declarer drive out the ace of diamonds before the king. In this case, West could clear the hearts but would then have no further entry.

The danger of a doubleton ace of diamonds is illusory. With such a holding declarer would always have enough tricks for the contract – four diamonds, two hearts, one spade, one club and at least one more high card. Similarly, West could hold a bare ace of diamonds, but again you cannot beat the contract in this case. So take your king and return a heart.



West	North	East	South
Pass	2♦	Pass	2NT ¹
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
End			
¹ 15+ HCP			

West leads the ten of hearts and the queen goes up. Are you going to cover, too, and what plans do you have in the trump suit?

Continued on page 27 ►

♠ 10 4 3

♥ Q J 5

♦ K Q J 10 5

♣ J 5

♠ 7 6

♥ 10 9 7 2

♦ 9 7 6 2

♣ A Q 3

♠ A Q 2

♥ K 8 4

♦ 8 4

♣ 10 8 7 4 2

♠ K J 9 8 5

♥ A 6 3

♦ A 3

♣ K 9 6

N

W

E

S

Whenever declarer has made a bid that suggests a particular number of points, you should count those in your hand (9) and dummy (10). This tells you that there is room for partner to hold 6 points, and the ace-queen of clubs over the king would clearly be helpful. Even this may not be good enough, though, if declarer can make use of dummy's diamond suit.

To protect your trump holding – the key to neutralising the diamonds – you want to keep declarer out of dummy. Accordingly, you should cover the first heart, forcing the ace to win.

Declarer may now cash the ace of diamonds, cross to the king and try the ten of spades. Again, you do not want to leave the lead on the table, so you play the ace (as the cards lie, the queen would also be good enough). Then you can play a club to partner, and switching back to hearts defeats the contract.

♠ 10 6 5

♥ J

♦ A J 5

♣ A K J 9 4 3

♠ A J 8 2

♥ Q 8

♦ Q 10 2

♣ 8 7 6 2

N

W

E

S

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	4♥
End			

West leads the four of spades to your ace and South plays the king.
What do you return, and do you intend to cover the jack of hearts?

♠ 10 6 5

♥ J

♦ A J 5

♣ A K J 9 4 3

♠ Q 9 7 4 3

♥ 10 6 4

♦ K 8 7 3

♣ 10

♠ A J 8 2

♥ Q 8

♦ Q 10 2

♣ 8 7 6 2

♠ K

♥ A K 9 7 5 3 2

♦ 9 6 4

♣ Q 5

N

W

E

S

If declarer has the king of diamonds, you are unlikely to defeat the contract (you would need three trump tricks), so it makes sense to place partner with this card and therefore switch to the two of diamonds.

The real issue is whether to cover the jack of hearts. In order to bid 4♥ with no support and facing a minimum opening bid South probably has seven hearts to the ace-king. If partner has 10-x-x, that would give you a trump trick and the potential for four tricks in all (two diamonds, a spade and a heart).

The trouble is that dummy's jack of diamonds makes it essential that partner is the one to make a trump trick and, if your queen of hearts appears on the first round, declarer may let it hold.

It is a different story if you casually play low on the jack – not so difficult if you have thought about it in advance. Rather than risk having West win the first round of trumps, declarer will probably cash the ace-king and turn to clubs.

The 4-1 club break then spells defeat.

♠ A J 4

♥ A 3 2

♦ A K 6 4 3

♣ J 10

♠ Q 8 5 2

♥ Q 8

♦ Q J 8 5

♣ Q 8 5

N

W

E

S

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
End			

West leads the ten of hearts and your queen wins the trick. What do you return and, more importantly, what are your plans for covering (or not) in clubs?

♠ A J 4

♥ A 3 2

♦ A K 6 4 3

♣ J 10

♠ K 9 3

♥ K 10 9 7 6

♦ 10 7

♣ 9 6 3

♠ Q 8 5 2

♥ Q 8

♦ Q J 8 5

♣ Q 8 5

♠ 10 7 6

♥ J 5 4

♦ 9 2

♣ A K 7 4 2

N

W

E

S

The lead is surely from K-10-9-x-x; so, unless South has the ace-king of clubs, you will defeat 3NT easily by clearing the hearts, as West will have a club entry. On the actual layout, you need to shut out South's clubs. Provided West has the nine of clubs, you can do this by covering the first round to leave the suit blocked. ■

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