

Second Hand Play II



In the last issue of BRIDGE we considered what to do when the declarer (or the dummy) led a small card and you were second to play to the trick. You may recall that the normal rule in this situation is to follow with a low card. However, life is not always as simple as that.

Safety First

Bridge is a bit like driving. The normal rule in the UK (and in many of the countries in the world that used to be coloured pink on maps) is to stick to the left. Despite this, in a one-way street, or a dual carriageway, or if you are turning right, or overtaking, or the left-hand lane is obstructed, it might be correct to move to the right. The key to safety on the road, and to defensive success, is knowing the normal rule and being aware of the circumstances in which you might deviate from it.

Layout 1:



Layout 2:



Layouts (1) and (2) show side suits and you can see why West does best to play high if South leads low. In both cases the opposing shortage, South's in layout

(1) and North's in (2) make it necessary to play the ace and king respectively to be sure of winning a trick.

If West ducks, South can ruff the second round in layout (1) and North the third round in layout (2). Playing high may not actually gain a trick because declarer may have a useful discard to take later, but it can hardly lose when your holding is this good.

Layout 3:



Layout (3) also represents a side suit. If West ducks the first round, North's jack wins and declarer may well be able to set up the suit with a ruff, making four tricks and not losing any.

If West plays high on the first round, something known as splitting honours, the defenders come to a trick.

Layout 4:



In layout (4), in which we are now looking at East's play, let us say that there are now no trumps. On the lead of a low card from North, East normally does best to play an honour. This will prevent declarer from scoring a cheap trick with the nine on the first round. True, if declarer can lead twice more from the North hand, it will still be

possible to make three tricks in the suit, but that makes your opponent work harder. Note also that if West could hold a singleton nine or king, or if South holds K-9-x-x and intends to play the king, East would fare better playing low.

Which Card From Equals?

You may have noticed that I have purposely avoided saying which of touching cards you should play (when you have decided not to play low). When you lead from a sequence, you lead high, whilst when you are in third seat, you play the lowest card of equals; which rule do you think you should follow here? Expert opinion is slightly divided on this issue, but I would say that if you want to make sure partner is aware of your strength, you should play your highest card. Normally, however, when declarer attacks a suit, the information about how the suit lies will help your opponent more than partner, so you should play randomly from equals.

Layout 5:



Can you see how the defenders might make two tricks in this suit in a no-trump contract even though declarer has sufficient entries to lead twice from the North hand? If East plays low on the first round, declarer will presumably follow the percentages and finesse the nine. By playing the queen on the first round, East gives declarer the losing option of imagining that the layout actually looks like this:

Layout 6:



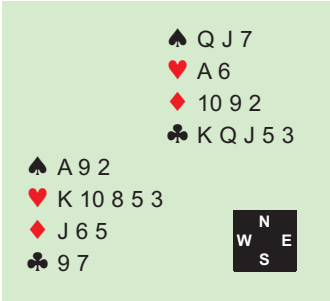
Of course, some declarers will be aware of this tactic, but unless West is short it costs nothing to try.

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POTTAGE ON DEFENCE continued from page 12

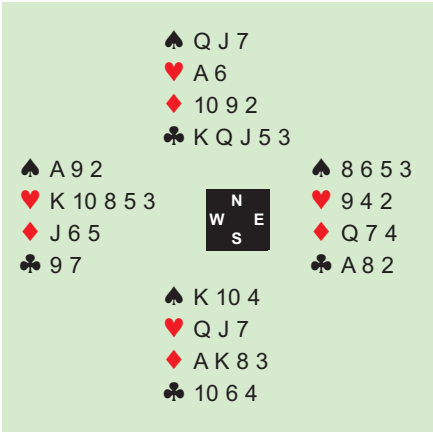
Sitting under dummy

The time has come to consider some full deals to see other reasons for playing high in second seat. Please start in the West chair.



After a simple sequence, a weak 1NT from South raised to game by North, you lead the five of hearts. Dummy plays low and partner's nine forces the queen. At trick two, declarer leads a small spade from hand. What do you do?

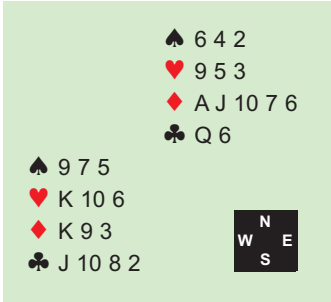
To conserve the entry to your long hearts it may seem natural to play low, but this would be a mistake. If partner has the king of spades, declarer can probably make nine tricks by way of two hearts, two diamonds (possibly with the aid of a finesse) and five clubs. In any case, there is no need to save an entry. The play to the first trick marks South with the jack of hearts (East would not play the nine from J-9-x), so you are only ever going to be able to run the hearts if East has three (or four) hearts. The danger in ducking is that partner has the ace of clubs rather than the king of spades. Look at the full deal:



With a spade trick in the bag, South could switch to clubs and make nine tricks – one spade, two diamonds, two hearts, and

four clubs. To avoid this, take the ace of spades and continue with a low heart.

In our next example declarer is in a suit contract, but the defensive strategy could equally arise at no-trumps:



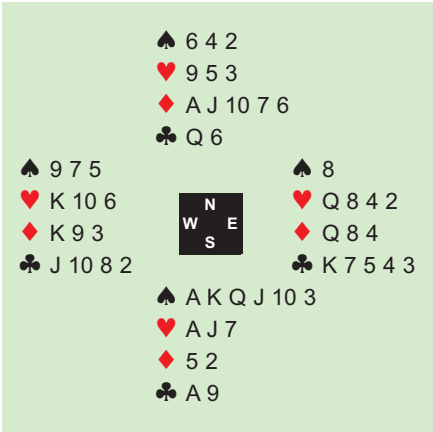
West	North	East	South
Pass	2NT	Pass	2♠*
Pass	4♠	End	3♠

*Acol

You lead the jack of clubs, covered by the queen, king and ace. South draws trumps in three rounds (East following once and discarding two low clubs), then leads a low diamond. What are your thoughts?

If partner has a singleton queen of diamonds, it will be necessary to play low, but this is a most unlikely position. A better reason for playing low is the fear that declarer has a singleton diamond. If so, putting up the king would expose partner's queen to a ruffing finesse.

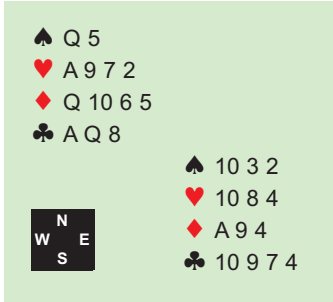
However, if South's shape is 6-3-1-3, you stand little chance of defeating the contract. In addition to the king of clubs and queen of diamonds, partner would need the ace and jack (or ace and queen) of hearts, leaving South too little for a strong-two opening. Your best bet is to play South for a doubleton in both minors, a layout something like this:



If you play low, South finesses dummy's ten and East faces an unenviable choice: duck and lose the defensive diamond trick, or win and allow the suit to run. Putting up the king changes the position radically: declarer can make one diamond trick by taking the ace but may prefer to duck the first round and finesse on the second, playing you for K-Q-x – then you get the contract two down.

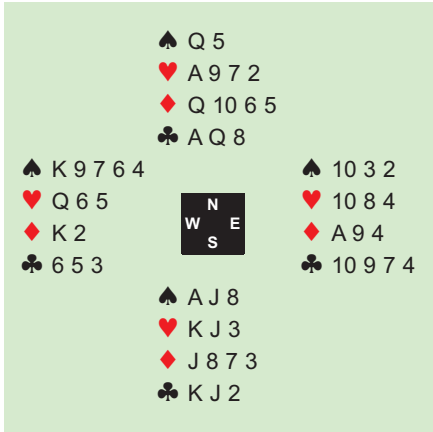
Sitting over dummy

Now please move across to the East seat.



South opens a weak 1NT and North raises to 3NT. West leads the ♠6 and dummy's queen wins, South playing the eight. At trick two, declarer leads a low diamond off dummy. What do you do?

For two reasons you should grab your ace. For one thing, you want to conserve partner's possible entry with the king of diamonds until the spades are established. For another, if declarer has the ace-jack of spades left, partner cannot safely continue the suit. This is the full deal:



Note that if you did not have the nine of diamonds your decision would be slightly trickier. In that case, declarer might have a two-way finesse against the jack of diamonds, which going in with the ace would resolve, but it would probably still be right to take your ace.

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♠ A 9 8 4 2	
♥ A K	
♦ J 7 2	
♣ J 9 4	
	♠ K 10 7
	♥ 10 6 4
	♦ K Q 10 3
	♣ Q 7 3
N	E
W	S

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♥*	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	End	2♠

* Transfer to spades

West leads the queen of hearts to the ace. What do you do when declarer leads a low spade off dummy?

The 'normal' play with this spade holding is low. If partner has Q-x, going in with the king would cost a trick. However, it would be unusual for South to choose to play in 3NT rather than 4♠ with three-card spade support and little semblance of a heart stopper, so you can reasonably place West with three spades. If South is the one with Q-x, it will prove vital to go in with the king and knock out dummy's remaining heart entry.

♠ A 9 8 4 2		
♥ A K		
♦ J 7 2		
♣ J 9 4		
♠ J 5 3		♠ K 10 7
♥ Q J 9 8 2	N	♥ 10 6 4
♦ 5 4	W	♦ K Q 10 3
♣ 10 6 5	S	♣ Q 7 3
		♠ Q 6
		♥ 7 5 3
		♦ A 9 8 6
		♣ A K 8 2

As you see, this play leaves the spades blocked. Declarer can eventually reach dummy by playing a club to the nine and later crossing to the jack but, by that time, your side will have scored three hearts, one spade and one club. In practice, your opponent is more likely to cash the ace and king of clubs in the hope the queen falls, but this does not work either.

Our final example is slightly more complicated, as your decision comes later in the play, and it involves a position that

can only arise in a suit contract:

♠ 9	
♥ 7 3 2	
♦ 10 8 5 3 2	
♣ A K J 3	
	♠ J 8 7 5 3
	♥ A 10 9 5
	♦ K 7
	♣ 9 4
N	E
W	S

West	North	East	South
1♥	3♣	3♥	1♣
Pass	5♣	End	3♠

West leads the king of hearts, which is ruffed. Declarer draw trumps in two rounds, West discarding a small heart on the second, then cashes the ace, king and queen of spades. Declarer throws two hearts from dummy, ruffs the fourth round of spades, West discarding a heart, and leads a diamond off dummy. Are you going to play the king or the seven?

Even if you cannot foresee what would happen if you played low, a simple count of tricks tells you what to do. Your side needs three tricks to defeat the contract and all three must come from diamonds. This means West must hold A-Q-x or A-J-x, making it perfectly safe to rise with the king and return the suit.

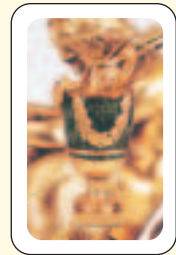
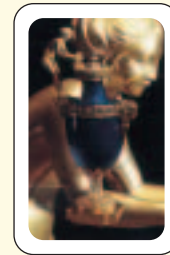
♠ 9		
♥ 7 3 2		
♦ 10 8 5 3 2		
♣ A K J 3		
♠ 10 6 2		♠ J 8 7 5 3
♥ K Q J 8 6 4	N	♥ A 10 9 5
♦ A J 6	W	♦ K 7
♣ 6	S	♣ 9 4
		♠ A K Q 4
		♥ Void
		♦ Q 9 4
		♣ Q 10 8 7 5 2

Can you see the result of ducking the diamond? West wins declarer's finesse of the nine with the jack and returns a low diamond to your king, but then you are stuck. You have only major-suit cards left and must lead one of them. This allows declarer to discard a diamond from hand and ruff in dummy to score the rest. ■

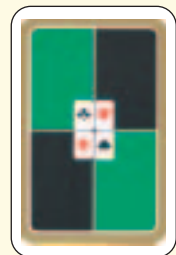
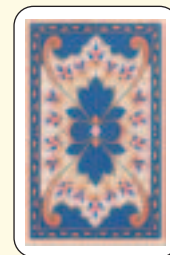
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