

## Tidbit 7

### “Second Hand Low, Third Hand High” (defending)

**Interpretation:** This recommends that when a defender is second to play, they should play a low card and when a defender is third to play, their partner having led a low card, they should play high. The thinking is that second-hand, faced with dummy or declarer playing after them, should let her partner, who is last to play, determine the final outcome. A defender in third hand plays high to partner’s lead of a small card in the hope of either winning the trick or setting one up for later.

This guideline is the norm but **be aware there are many exceptions**. For a defender in the second position, playing low will be the norm if the dummy (or what is perceived to be in declarer’s hand if she leads from dummy) does not appear to be an immediate threat. For a defender in the third position, playing high after partner’s lead will also be the norm unless, obviously, declarer has already played an intervening card that is higher than what you hold or if circumstances suggest a lower card might be more advantageous (cf “Rule of Eleven”) or less disadvantageous to her hand....but, if you are in any doubt, it is recommended to play high in third seat.

*Exceptions where second hand may choose not to play low include “splitting honours” when holding, for example, the KQ after declarer has led towards the AJ in dummy or, in a trump contract, taking the A immediately when declarer leads a non-trump towards the K, lest declarer holds a singleton or in recognition of the need to cash tricks quickly in other suits. If declarer leads an honour card from her hand or dummy, the second hand defender may choose to play a higher honour (cover) in the hope that, by taking out two of declarer’s honours for one of the defenders, she will promote winners in the suit for the defence.*

*Following partner’s lead of a low card, third hand defender might take a finesse against the dummy rather than playing their highest card if they believe that this will give them advantage. If partner leads a middle card, denying an honour, in a suit that third hand has bid during the auction, there is no point in her playing her highest card in that suit if her suit is broken and it is simply going to advantage declarer.*

**Example:**

—  
Dummy  
J63

You  
K105

The defence has not bid and your partner leads a 7 against 3NT. Declarer plays the 3. Do you play the K, your highest card? As long as your partner **has led her fourth highest card** the “Rule of 11” will help. Subtract the lead from 11 and that is the number of cards higher than the 7 in the other three hands. Hence, declarer has only one card higher than the 7 and the play of the 10 is correct in this instance. (Try giving declarer different cards higher than the 7 and deduce for yourself that the play of the 10 will ensure that declarer wins one trick in the suit at most whereas playing the K will allow declarer to win 2 tricks if she holds the A.)

*Exercise 1: You hold only K10. What card do you play now on the lead of the 7 and why?*

**Exercise 2:**

*Dummy (North)*

♠Q104  
♥QJ1085  
♦Q7  
♣K93

*You (East)*

♠J82  
♥963  
♦K1082  
♣J108

*Your partner, West opens 1D, North (dummy) overcalls 1H and you bid 2D. South now bids 2NT passed out. Your partner leads the 5D and declarer plays the 7D from dummy. What do you play?*

**Answers to Tidbit 6 Exercises 1 and 2:**

**Questions:**

*Exercise 1:*

North(declarer) opened 1D, you (East) pre-empted 2S, South doubled and North bid 3NT. You led a spade to partner's JS and declarer's QS. Declarer leads the KH which you win with the AH and lead your KS to partner's 3S and declarer's AS. Declarer now leads the QD towards the AJ7 of diamonds in the dummy. Do you cover?

	East
	♠KT7652
	♥A2
	♦K652
	♣6
♠8	
♥98753	
♦AJ7	
♣QJT9	
	South

*Exercise 2:*

West	♣K85	
		♣QJT South

On the same board you are now West. Declarer has lost just the AH and has won, apart from the AS and QS, 4 x heart tricks and 3 x diamond tricks and is now in dummy. The cards remaining in your hand and dummy are shown. Declarer leads the QC from dummy at Trick 11. Do you cover?

**Answers:**

BD: 17	♠AQ94	Dir: N
	♥KQJ	Vul: None
	♦QT94	
	♣A7	
♠J3		♠KT7652
♥T64		♥A2
♦83		♦K652
♣K85432		♣6
	♠8	
	♥98753	
	♦AJ7	
	♣QJT9	

Here is the whole hand. As East you should not cover the QD when it is led by declarer (North) because your KD cannot be caught. On the bidding, partner is also very unlikely to hold 10(xx) in diamonds which would be promoted if you covered. You have no useful diamonds to promote yourself. As West you should not cover the QC in the end game. Looking at dummy, there is clearly nothing to promote by doing so and if you don't cover, declarer may not risk the finesse given partner may still have a winning spade and/or diamond.