

SECOND HAND PLAY – SECOND HAND LOW

When declarer leads a **small** card from hand or from dummy it is correct to play low about 75% of the time.

SAVING OUR HIGH CARD FOR CAPTURING A HIGH CARD

When Declarer Leads From Hand

	K 6 3	
A 10 7 5		J 8 4
	Q 9 2	

Suppose that South (declarer) leads the 2. If West plays the ace, dummy will play low and NS will later make both the king and the queen. If West plays low, North's king will win this trick but South will be unable to make a trick with the queen.

Playing the ace is a mistake because it allows NS to play low cards from both hands at the same trick. If, instead, West follows the principle of "Second Hand Low", North has to play the king to prevent East from winning the trick cheaply. Now West still has the ace to capture South's queen.

Second Hand Low is also correct when the defender can't beat dummy's high card:

	A 10 6 3	
J 5		Q 8 7
	K 9 4 2	

When declarer leads the 2 from hand, suppose that West plays the jack "to force out dummy's ace". This is a mistake, since declarer would then be able to finesse against East's queen on the second round and lose no tricks in the suit. Here East is likely to have the king or queen, in which case dummy's ace doesn't need to be forced out by playing the jack. (If East has only low cards, then West's play is irrelevant.)

In general, the purpose of "Second Hand Low" is to save one's high cards for a later trick in the suit, knowing that fourth hand still has an opportunity to win this trick.

When Declarer Leads From Dummy

Second hand low also applies after a lead from dummy. For example:

	J 9 2	
K 8 6		A 10 4 3
	Q 7 5	

When the 2 is led from dummy, East should play low. South plays the queen and West wins with the king, after which East makes tricks with the ace and ten. Playing Second Hand Low therefore prevents NS from winning a trick in the suit. If East had made the mistake of winning the first lead with the ace, NS would be able to establish one trick from their remaining queen and jack.

LEAVING DECLARER WITH A GUESS

Another reason for playing Second Hand Low is to leave declarer with a guess. e.g.

	K J 6	
A 7 3		Q 10 9 5 4
	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	

In a suit contract, South (declarer) leads the 2. If West plays the ace, the defenders won't be able to take any further tricks in the suit, since South can ruff the third round. If West plays low (without hesitation!) declarer may assume that West has the queen and try dummy's jack. Now the defenders will win two tricks in the suit.

WHAT IF DECLARER HAS A SINGLETON?

It's not always right to play Second Hand Low. For example, if declarer leads towards dummy's king at a suit contract and the defence suspect that declarer might have a singleton, second hand should sometimes play the ace. If not, dummy could win with the king and declarer would lose no tricks in the suit.

	K J 6	
A 8 7 3		Q 10 9 5 4
	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Here Second Hand Low could still be correct. If West plays the 3 and dummy plays the king, declarer doesn't actually gain a trick, since this trick would be available later if West had played the ace. But if West plays low, declarer might decide to play dummy's jack, in which case he would make no tricks in the suit.

The defence often won't know whether declarer has a singleton, although the bidding often provides useful clues. When in doubt, a defender should play second hand low.

SPLITTING HONOURS

Second hand should often play the lower of touching honours instead of playing low:

	K 10 6	
Q J 3		8 5 4
	A 9 7 <input type="checkbox"/>	

South leads the 2. If West plays low, declarer might play North's 10 and lose no tricks in the suit. West should therefore "split his honours" by playing the jack. The same applies when North is declarer and the 2 is led from dummy.

WHEN TO PLAY SECOND HAND HIGH

Playing high to win the trick is normally correct if this would be the trick that beats the contract (e.g. the contract is 4♥ and the defence have already taken 3 tricks).

Playing high is also usually correct if the earlier play indicates that the defence will take enough later tricks to defeat the contract e.g. when we need to get the lead to switch to another suit in which we know partner has winners.