

THIRD HAND PLAY – THIRD HAND HIGH

When defender leads a card and dummy has only low cards in the suit, it is usually correct for the other defender to play high.

WHEN DUMMY HAS NO HIGH CARD, 3RD HAND SHOULD PLAY HIGH

Using a High Card to Force out Declarer's High Card

When a defender leads a suit and dummy has no significant cards, the other defender should generally play high, to prevent declarer from making a cheap trick in the suit.

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

Suppose that West leads the 5 and North (dummy) plays the 3. If East plays the 10 (or the 2), South will win the trick with the jack and later make a second trick with the ace. Instead, East should play the queen to force out declarer's ace. Now declarer makes only one trick in the suit.

Using a High Card to Win the Trick

Third hand high also applies when the trick can (or might) be won. For example:

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

When West leads the 5, East should play the ace. Playing the jack would allow South to make an undeserved trick with the queen.

At NT, this position could also arise with the king and ace being swapped. East should still play high, after which the defence can win 4 tricks in the suit.

In general, the purpose of "Third Hand High" is to use one's high card efficiently, knowing that partner has no opportunity to win this trick.

PLAY LOW (OR LOWEST) FROM TOUCHING HONOURS

When West leads the 3, East should play the jack. When this forces out South's ace, West knows that East has the queen (because declarer would have played the Queen not the Ace if he held it!). West also knows that East doesn't have the ten. Note that this convention (following with bottom of a sequence) is the opposite to that used for leading a suit.

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

When **dummy** has a high card, it can be wrong for 3rd hand high to play high. See ['Finessing Against Dummy'](#).

DRAWING INFERENCES FROM THIRD HAND'S PLAY

Locating the missing high cards

The convention for third hand play normally makes it possible for the opening leader to draw certain inferences from partner's play. For example:

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| J 8 6 $\boxed{3}$ | A 10 $\boxed{2}$ |
| | K played |
| | 5 played |

Suppose that West leads the 3 and North (dummy) plays the 2. When East plays the king, West realises that East would have played the queen if he held both the king and queen (low from touching honours). Therefore West knows that South has the queen. West may later use this information to switch to another suit.

The following sequence of plays is also revealing:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| K 7 $\boxed{5}$ | Q 6 $\boxed{4}$ |
| | 10 played |
| | A played |

West leads the 5 and North (dummy) plays the 4. East plays the 10 and declarer wins with the ace. Partner must have the jack, otherwise declarer would have won the trick with that card. Declarer must have the 9, since partner didn't play it. West may later decide to underlead his king again, expecting declarer to play low from dummy.

Locating some of the missing high cards

Here there's more than one option as to the position of the missing high cards:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Q 8 6 $\boxed{2}$ | 9 7 4 $\boxed{3}$ |
| | J played |
| | A played |

Declarer must have the 10, otherwise partner would have played it. But the position of the king is unknown, since partner would play the jack from KJ and declarer might play the ace from AK.

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 7 $\boxed{5}$ 4 | J 6 $\boxed{3}$ |
| | 10 played |
| | A played |

Declarer must have the 9, otherwise partner would have played it. But declarer might have AKQ9, AK9 or just A9 (with or without small cards).

Opening leader should make the deductions immediately

The opening leader should study the cards played to the first trick and make any possible inferences immediately. This could be important if the defender has a critical decision to make at an early stage of the defence.