

SECOND HAND PLAY – COVERING HONOURS

When declarer leads a **high** card from hand or from dummy it is often correct to cover with a higher card (if possible).

COVER AN HONOUR WITH AN HONOUR

When Declarer Leads From Dummy

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

Suppose that North (dummy) leads the queen. If East plays low, declarer will also play low. After this, declarer could make all the tricks by playing from dummy again and finessing the jack. If East covers the queen with the king, South's ace will win this trick but West will later make a trick with the 10.

In general, the purpose of "Cover an honour with an honour" is to force the opponents to use up two high cards on the same trick. This often enables a trick to be promoted in one of the defenders' hands.

When Declarer Leads From Hand

Covering an honour with an honour also applies after a lead from hand. For example:

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

When the 10 is led from hand, West should cover with the king. North wins with the ace and also makes the queen and jack, but East's 9 is available for the fourth round of the suit. If West makes the mistake of playing low, North will play low. Now a subsequent finesse will give NS four tricks in the suit.

Note that if South had a third card in the suit (or 10 9 doubleton) covering with the king wouldn't help, but it wouldn't lose a trick either. The same would apply if South additionally held the 10 in the first example above.

WHEN NOT TO COVER AN HONOUR WITH AN HONOUR

Don't cover when there is no possibility of promoting a lower card

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

When South (declarer) leads the 10, West should play low, restricting NS to three tricks in the suit. If West covers with the king, NS make four tricks.

Don't cover if there is nothing to promote.

Cover only the latter (or last) of touching honours

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

North (dummy) leads the queen. If East plays the king, South wins with the ace, after which he can take a further finesse against West's 10. If East plays low on the queen but later covers the jack, West will make a trick with the 10.

Don't cover if dummy has touching honours. Wait until the last of the equal cards is played.

Don't cover if dummy is short in the suit

Covering an honour is generally wrong because dummy will be forced to play its honour on a later round. This principle is often applicable when dummy has 3 cards:

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

South leads the queen. If West covers with the king, NS make 4 tricks in the suit. If West plays low, the king will win the fourth round. Retaining the high card is generally correct, since if declarer has length in the suit he would then be unable to win all the tricks.

Don't cover if dummy has fewer cards in the suit than you.

Don't cover if the bidding indicates that partner will be short in the suit led

Second hand should be wary of covering if there is a fair chance of crashing partner's honour. For example, suppose that the following suit is trumps:

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

When the jack is led from North (dummy) East might be tempted to cover with the king, but if he does so South will win with the ace and West's queen will also fall, resulting in no tricks for the defence. East should realise that West will be short in the suit, in which case it won't be possible to promote a trick.

Don't cover if partner may have a singleton in the suit led