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Second Player Play; defensive problems

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 3	
	♥ 97652	
	♦ 942	
	♣ AQJ3	
West		East
♠ KQ86		♠ A975
♥ 84		♥ AT3
♦ AKJ73		♦ QT5
♣ KT		♣ 865
	South	
	♠ JT42	
	♥ KQJ	
	♦ 86	
	♣ 9742	

This series is all about defence and relates to *second player play*. When you are the second player in any trick you are in the worst position of all. Your right-hand opponent has chosen to lead this suit and you are sandwiched between your two opponents (between a rock and a hard place, you might say). So you often can't win – whatever you do can be countered by the next player (be it dummy or declarer).

However... the shining light on the horizon is that you have a partner and he is sitting as fourth player, the last person to play to this trick. Being last to play is obviously the best position to be in – you can survey the other three cards and then make your decision. So – as second player – it is generally wise to leave the decision to partner. In effect, don't try to be smart – just let the trick ride. This is the origin of the ancient adage (it dates from whist) of "*Second Player Plays Low*".

Well, like all bridge aphorisms it is sound in theory but there are exceptions. Hence this series. Let's see how you do.

Hand 1 is a common enough example.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	P
1♦	P	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♣	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ K

You are South, defending 4♣ after West has strongly raised a 1♠ response. You have a natural lead of the ♥K and you see a very respectable dummy.

East takes the ♥A at trick one and immediately plays the ♠A and tries the ♠9. What should you do? Well, this play is pure intimidation. It is designed to make you do something foolish, should you have your actual holding of ♠J 10 × ×.

Your right play is to play low and wait. Declarer (not being gifted with second sight) is bound to play dummy's ♠Q, playing for the 68% chance of a 3-2 trump break. (If he doesn't do that you should keep your cards up!)

If you were to make the pointless play of "splitting your honours" it would open up a marked finesse when North discarded – declarer would take the ♠Q, cross to hand with a Diamond and finesse the ♠8. Now he would have four Spades, five Diamonds and the ♥A.

As it is, though, he cannot cope with the 4-1 trump split and the ♠A being offside. East can only draw three trumps and play off the Diamond winners. You can ruff one of those, cash a Heart and – in response to partner's loud and clear signal – play a Club to partner's two tricks there. One down.



Second Player Play; defensive problems

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ Q

Here you are defending 3NT by West (on your left) and partner leads the ♥Q, Declarer gravely thanks his partner, takes the ♥A on table and leads a Diamond.

Now, many defenders are in too much of a hurry on hands like these. Anxious to gain the lead early (to return a Heart, presumably) they *split their Diamond honours* by putting in the ♦J.

This is wrong on so many levels. You cannot be denied a Diamond trick even if you play low. True, declarer might have ♦A 9 × and he might play the ♦9 – but equally he **might** have no such holding and he **might** do no such thing. He is not gifted with second sight – he has no idea how Diamonds are breaking.

Here, he makes the entirely reasonable play of leading a Diamond to the ♦A and playing a low one back towards the dummy. If the Diamonds were distributed in any other way then West could guarantee himself four Diamond tricks. As it is, though, he is holed below the waterline by the 4-1 split. He cannot avoid losing two Diamonds and three Hearts and is one off.

Now suppose you were to *split your honours* at trick two. The ♦K kills your ♦J and partner's ♦9 (an important card) and now declarer can just run the ♦8 round to your ♦Q setting up the suit for four tricks. From the Western perspective the hand would be pianola – 3NT would make easily.

In these positions you should leave the trick to partner. **You are not a one-man army!**

North
 ♠ JT62
 ♥ QJT65
 ♦ 9
 ♣ KT2

West
 ♠ A973
 ♥ K4
 ♦ A84
 ♣ J875



East
 ♠ K84
 ♥ A7
 ♦ KT763
 ♣ A43

South
 ♠ Q5
 ♥ 9832
 ♦ QJ52
 ♣ Q96

A routine auction to a routine contract and yet again you are defending with a poor hand.


Precisely how should you defend, though?



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Second Player Play; defensive problems

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ AT952	
	♥ 87	
	♦ 85	
	♣ QT87	
West		East
♠ 643		♠ J7
♥ QJ63		♥ AK542
♦ QJT7		♦ AK32
♣ KJ		♣ 64
	South	
	♠ KQ8	
	♥ T9	
	♦ 964	
	♣ A9532	

You watch the bidding as your opponents reach game in Hearts.

You have an awkward lead. After that you have to think where four tricks might be coming from.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
P	P	1♥	P
3♥	P	4♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ K

East opens 1♥ after three Passes with 15 points and a semi-balanced hand. When West raises to 3♥ he happily accepts the invitation and bids game.

You decide to make the attacking lead of the ♠K from ♠KQ × and continue with the ♠Q after partner signals strong encouragement with the ♠10. You may as well try your luck with a third round of Spades but declarer ruffs.

Declarer draws trumps in two rounds and cashes his Diamonds, finishing in the closed hand. Now comes the critical point of the hand as declarer plays the ♣4 towards dummy's ♠K J

This is a key moment. You play the ♣3 as smoothly and calmly as you can. Playing the ♣A would resolve declarer's guess in the suit. Even hesitating would tell declarer you have something to think about which may be clue enough in a situation which is a straight 50-50 guess.

This is an oft recurring situation at this game, the famous "King-Jack guess". Defenders should do their thinking well in advance and not be caught on the hop at the critical moment. They should **Count-Plan-Execute** as well as declarer. Here, you don't know North has the ♠Q but you lose nothing by hoping.


With nothing to go on except his horoscope declarer plays the ♣J from dummy and you are pleased to see partner win with the ♠Q. Another Club follows to your ♣A and declarer is one down. Yes, some days declarer will guess correctly and play dummy's ♠K and make his contract. If he does that: good luck to him – he will have earned his success.



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Second Player Play; defensive problems

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ 864	
	♥ QJ8	
	♦ J8	
	♣ K8762	
West		East
♠ 532		♠ AKQ
♥ A4		♥ K952
♦ QT973		♦ 652
♣ AQ4		♣ JT3
	South	
	♠ JT97	
	♥ T763	
	♦ AK4	
	♣ 95	

Another day, another 3NT contract.

How should you defend this one?

West	North	East	South
P	P	1NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ J

East plays in 3NT on this deal and you have a ready-made lead of the ♠J.

Declarer wins deceptively with the ♠K (although you suspect that he has the ♠A K Q by dint of the fact that partner followed at trick one with the ♠4, a discouraging card if ever there were one). East now sets about his long suit by leading a Diamond.

There are many players who would grab the ♦K at this point – but where's the sense in that? *What's the rush? Where's the fire?* Sure, declarer could take the trick with dummy's ♦Q but *he doesn't know that*. You can only help declarer if you defend by grabbing tricks.

East's best shot is to finesse the ♦10, playing you for the ♦J. This is roughly a 50% shot to make three tricks whereas playing the ♦Q is 25% or thereabouts. As the cards lie, East is unlucky.

North (a surprised North) wins the ♦J and plugs away in Spades, eventually setting you up a long Spade. With the Club finesse wrong for East he now has too many losers (a Club, three Diamonds and a Spade) and goes one down.


Remember – ***everything comes to he who waits.***



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Second Player Play; defensive problems

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ A542		
	♥ 94		
	♦ T985		
	♣ A86		
West		East	
♠ 63		♠ KQJ	
♥ AJ62		♥ KQ753	
♦ 643		♦ AK	
♣ Q732		♣ J54	
	South		
	♠ T987		
	♥ T8		
	♦ QJ72		
	♣ KT9		

You watch your opponents bid to 4♥ in a straightforward auction.

The defence depends on working out who has what cards and how you can stop declarer getting the trick he needs in a particular suit.

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♥	P
2♥	P	4♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ T

You (South) lead the ♠10 against 4♥ after your opponents bid game via 1♥ – 2♥ – 4♥.

Your partner wins the opening lead with the ♠A and returns a Spade, won by declarer with the ♠Q. East draws two rounds of trumps finishing in hand with the ♥Q. Now comes the ♠K on which a Diamond is discarded from dummy. The ♦A K follow and then declarer plays the ♣4 from hand towards dummy.

This is the critical moment. You must play the ♣9 (or the ♣10 if you feel strongly about it!) What you must *not* do is to grab the trick with the ♣K.

Declarer has six tricks and has three trumps remaining (you know from the play that he started with five). So declarer only needs one trick from Clubs and if he has the ♣A there is nothing you can do; 4♥ is simply going to make.

So you have to place partner with the ♣A. If partner also has the ♣J it doesn't matter what you do (declarer will lose three Clubs no matter what) so the critical case is where declarer has the ♣J.

If you play the ♣K declarer will be left with the ♣Q and the ♣J against partner's ♣A and be guaranteed a trick. If you correctly play the ♣9, though, dummy will be forced to cover with the ♣Q. Partner can win with the ♣A and return a Club *through* declarer's ♣J × and declarer doesn't get a Club trick. (And you – the defence – make three).


You defeat this contract because you count declarer's tricks and avoid *grabbing tricks*, a trap that many players fall into.



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Second Player Play; defensive problems

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ JT8	
	♥ QJT92	
	♦ T4	
	♣ K73	
West		East
♠ A43		♠ KQ5
♥ K63		♥ A7
♦ K72		♦ A863
♣ QJ52		♣ T986
	South	
	♠ 9762	
	♥ 854	
	♦ QJ95	
	♣ A4	

You are (once again) defending on this deal, watching as the opposition sail into game.

How might you defeat West here?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ Q

Once again you are defending a game, this time after a simple 1NT – 3NT sequence.

Partner leads the ♥Q, surely the top-of-a-sequence, and dummy wins with the ♥A before leading the ♠10. You need to decide whether to follow the old adage **second player plays low**. Well, these phrases often provide sound guidance but they are not hard and fast rules.

If you are going to defeat this contract it looks like you will need to make tricks in partner's Heart suit. Declarer must have the ♥K and you need to *knock it out*. There is much to be said for winning this trick with the ♣A and driving out the ♥K now.

Partner will still need an entry to his Hearts but, if and when he gets in, the Hearts will be ready to go. It may be that partner's entry is in Clubs. If that is the case it is essential to play the ♣A now to preserve partner's entry.

After you take the ♣A and play a Heart declarer can do nothing. West still needs to set up a Club trick or two and leads the suit again. Partner gleefully grabs this with the ♣K and then cashes sufficient Hearts to defeat the contract. Declarer sullenly claims the balance.

Note what would have happened had you **not** taken your ♣A. Partner would have taken the ♣K and cleared the Hearts but – provided declarer ducks one round of Hearts – you would have no Heart to lead when in play with the ♣A. Contract made.