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Second Player Play; declarer play problems.

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ K4	
	♥ Q94	
	♦ KJ962	
	♣ K96	
West		East
♠ AJ762		♠ Q98
♥ K3		♥ T8752
♦ T4		♦ Q8
♣ J542		♣ Q83
	South	
	♠ T53	
	♥ AJ6	
	♦ A753	
	♣ AT7	

This series is also about **Second Hand Play** but we have switched the focus from defending to declaring.

Many players think that **Second Player Plays Low** is a rule that should be applied to declarer as well as to a defender. Not a bit of it! The "rule" (such as it is) is guidance for a defender who is often struggling in the dark. Declarer, on the other hand, can see his side's assets so is much better placed to see whether he should play high or low from the second hand.

Many of these problems arise at trick one. Be warned!

What should you do here, in Hand 1?

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

Lead: ♠ 6

You are in a quickly-reached 3NT on this deal and West leads a low Spade (the ♠6 to be precise). What should you do?

Well, this is all about the play at trick one. Playing a low Spade from dummy (**Second Player Plays Low**, anybody?) will lead to a rapid one off. East will take the ♠Q and West will then have the next four Spade tricks. Oops!

You simply have to try the ♠K here. If West has the ♠A (and why shouldn't he? Players often underlead Aces against No-trump contracts) then your only chance to make the doubleton ♠K is now – at trick one. So you close your eyes and call for the King.

[It should be noted, in passing, that playing a low Spade would be the right thing to do if West had led from ♠Q J x x x. However, that is less likely than having led from the ♠A. Playing West for one specific card gives you better odds than playing him for two specific cards].

When you open your eyes you find that the ♠K has held. Now all that you need is to make five Diamond tricks. Well with nine Diamonds missing the ♦Q the odds favour playing off the ♦A K and hoping that the suit breaks evenly. This is a percentage play, the alternative (cash the ♦A and finesse the ♦J) being inferior by a few percentage points.

This is your lucky day and 3NT rolls home with one Spade, one Heart, five Diamonds and two Clubs.


Trying the Heart finesse for an overtrick would be pushing your luck just a little far...



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Second Player Play; declarer play problems.

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ K4	
	♥ Q94	
	♦ KJ962	
	♣ K96	
West		East
♠ QT862		♠ A97
♥ K3		♥ T8752
♦ T4		♦ Q8
♣ J542		♣ Q83
	South	
	♠ J53	
	♥ AJ6	
	♦ A753	
	♣ AT7	

Another one of those weird *X-Files* type deals that keep cropping up in VuBridge.

Surely this is Hand 1 all over again...?

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

Lead: ♠ 6

You are in 3NT on this deal, reached after swift bidding, and West leads a low Spade (the ♠6 to be precise). What should you do, when you have recovered from the surprise of seeing a deal that has all the appearance of being a clone of the last one?

Well, this (again) is all about the play at trick one. Should you try the ♠K, hoping that West has underled the ♠A? Should you play a low Spade from table? Why?

Well, the holding of the ♠J in the closed hand totally alters matters here. You are 100% sure of making a Spade trick on this deal if you *don't* play the ♠K from dummy. No matter where the ♠Q and ♠A are, playing low from the table gives you a sure (if slow) trick in the suit.

Here, East (loath to part with this ♠A while the King remains on the table) puts on the ♠9 and you take trick one with the ♠J. It would not have helped his cause to play the ♠A as the King would become an instant trick. Even if you were to swap the ♠A and the ♠Q, though, playing low from the dummy does not prevent you from making a Spade trick – eventually.

Now (having won trick one) all that you need is to make five Diamond tricks. Well, in the same position as in Hand 1 you play off the ♦A K, hoping that the suit breaks evenly. This is the percentage play and it works once again. Be warned, though, such suits are prone to break 3-1 quite often...

On this occasion 3NT rolls home with one Spade, one Heart, five Diamonds and two Clubs.


Can you see what would have happened had you played dummy's ♠K at trick one? East would have pounced on that with his Ace and returned a Spade, piercing the remaining ♠J ×, and allowing the defenders to take the first five tricks. Oops!



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Second Player Play; declarer play problems.

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

	North	
	♠ KQ6	
	♥ K7	
	♦ AT54	
	♣ QJT4	
West		East
♠ T5		♠ J9872
♥ AJ942		♥ T85
♦ J6		♦ Q983
♣ K875		♣ 3
	South	
	♠ A43	
	♥ Q63	
	♦ K72	
	♣ A962	

You reach a game contract following the route of a well-worn track.

Now... how should you play it?

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

Lead: ♥ 4

You reach 3NT after the briefest (and most common) of auctions.

West leads the ♥4 against 3NT, which you assume is the fourth highest of his longest and strongest. Pausing to count your tricks you can see six on top (to wit: three Spades, two Diamonds and a Club) with at least two more to come from Clubs and one more from Hearts.

So you appear to have ample tricks for the contract... except you must make sure you are not wide open in Hearts if you end up losing the lead whilst setting up the Clubs.

If you were to play a low Heart from dummy to this first trick you will be forced to win with the ♥Q (East, would be mad to play the ♥A on "thin air" even if he had it). Now, should you lose the lead in Clubs you would have no stopper in Hearts because the bare ♥K would fall under the ♥A. Not a good plan.

A better plan is to try the ♥K from table on the opening lead. If East plays the ♥A and returns a Heart you would be reduced to the Club finesse and the hope that the ♣K is with East.

Where this Plan scores big time is when West has the ♥A and the King wins. Now you can run the ♣Q, sit back and watch the show. If the Club finesse wins you make an overtrick. If it fails (as here) West is in a hole. If he leads Hearts again he just gives you a cheap trick with the ♥Q. If he switches suits you are in easy street as you have nine winners.

This then is the play. You play the ♥K at trick one and it holds the trick. You play the ♣Q and run it. The ♣Q is allowed to hold so you repeat the finesse with the ♣J. This one loses to the ♣K and West switches to a Spade desperately trying to find an entry in his partner's hand.


You win this with the ♠Q on the table and all that remains is to cash the remaining winners in Spades, Clubs and Diamonds. Having made your contract you can relax and lose interest.



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Second Player Play; declarer play problems.

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

	North	
	♠ KQ6	
	♥ K7	
	♦ AT54	
	♣ QJT4	
West		East
♠ T5		♠ J9872
♥ AJ942		♥ 865
♦ J6		♦ Q983
♣ 8753		♣ A
	South	
	♠ A43	
	♥ QT3	
	♦ K72	
	♣ K962	

Another VuBridge deal, spookily similar to the previous one (Hand 3).

How will you handle it?

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

Lead: ♥ 4

You play in a rapidly bid 3NT (you may note that the auctions are following some sort of theme here!) and West kicks off with low Heart lead.

You can see that you have just five top tricks (three Spades and two Diamonds) although you must come to at least one Heart and the Clubs are just begging to be set up for three tricks.

So... what do you play at trick one? The ♥K or the ♥7? And why? In Hand 3 it was essential to play the ♥K so that the ♥Q × remained in hand as a *semi-stopper*, preventing West from leading the suit again. What has changed here? The answer is – possession of the ♥10 in the closed hand. This is a crucial card and it changes everything.

By playing a low card from dummy at trick one you are assured of two Heart tricks regardless of who has what in Hearts. Here, West has the ♥A J but it wouldn't matter a fig if East held either (or both) of the honours. However they are split you must make two Heart tricks – provided you run the opening lead to hand.

Having scored a cheap trick with the ♥10 it's easy to make 3NT. The ♣A is knocked out and a Heart return holds no threat to you. All it does is set up a second Heart trick and an overtrick.


You make three Spades, two Hearts, two Diamonds and three Clubs.



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Second Player Play; declarer play problems.

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ KJ83	
	♥ Q652	
	♦ Q4	
	♣ AJ3	
West		East
♠ A62		♠ 754
♥ 74		♥ JT83
♦ KJ853		♦ T96
♣ Q74		♣ KT5
	South	
	♠ QT9	
	♥ AK9	
	♦ A72	
	♣ 9862	

You reach game (again) and have to reflect how to make the extra tricks.

'Twas ever thus. It's all down to **Counting** and **Planning**.

Mind you, you knew that...

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♦
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ 5

You reach 3NT which, by way of variation, is reached via a Stayman enquiry and a negative response.

You get the ♦5 lead from West and you take time out for **Counting** and **Planning**. You can see just five top tricks (three Hearts, the ♦A and the ♣A). Spades will provide another three once the ♣A is knocked out.

You need one more trick and you might get it from Hearts if they split 3-3. That's a Plan but the odds are not good (36% if you want the precise figure).

What is the right play in Diamonds – after this opening lead? Is there a chance of making more than one trick in Diamonds? If so, we would have no need of any – er – heartbreak as two Diamond tricks would go nicely with three Spades, three Hearts and a Club.

Well, West is favourite to have the ♦K. He has led his best suit and that is as likely to be headed by the ♦K as not. If the ♦K is with West we have to play her ladyship, the Queen, at trick one from dummy. If East has the ♦K then Her Majesty is doomed in any case.

*Digression...Note that in this case (where you play the ♦Q and East plonks the King on it) if you play the ♦A at trick one you will be wide-open in Diamonds. So you should **hold up** your ♦A for two rounds then hope East has the ♠A and Hearts break 3-3.*


However... on this actual layout of the cards the play of the ♦Q from dummy is successful; it wins the trick. Now it is easy. You knock out the ♠A, knowing you have sufficient tricks. If Hearts are 3-3 you'd make an overtrick but they aren't (so failure to play the ♦Q at trick one would have meant failure to secure the contract).

You still make three Spades, three Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club. Good enough for 3NT.



Second Player Play; declarer play problems.

VB#14 Y2 Second Player Play ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 6
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ KJ83	
	♥ Q652	
	♦ Q4	
	♣ AJ3	
West		East
♠ A62		♠ 754
♥ 74		♥ JT83
♦ J9853		♦ K62
♣ Q74		♣ KT5
	South	
	♠ QT9	
	♥ AK9	
	♦ AT7	
	♣ 9862	

Eerie stuff again on VuBridge. Hand 6 is like Hand 5.

There must be a difference – but what is it?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♦
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ 5

As in Hand 5 you reach 3NT via a Stayman enquiry and a negative response.

You get the ♦5 lead from West and you should take time out for **Counting** and for **Planning**. You should be able to see five top tricks (three Hearts, the ♦A and the ♣A). Spades will provide another three once the ♣A has been knocked out.

You need one more trick and you might get it from Hearts if they split 3-3, although the odds are not good (36% if you want to be exact).

What is the right play in Diamonds – after this opening lead? Is there a chance of making more than one trick in Diamonds? If so, we would have no need to rely on Hearts as two Diamond tricks would go nicely with three Spades, three Hearts and a Club.

The Diamond suit is key. Now, on a similar layout in Hand 5 you had to play dummy's ♦Q at trick one. (*Use it or lose it*). And here? What difference does the ♦10 in the closed hand make?

The answer is that it makes all the difference in the world. Possession of the ♦10 crucially alters your line of play.

If you play low from dummy at trick one (that is: you **don't** play the Queen) you are **guaranteed** two Diamond tricks, no matter who has what in the suit. It is important for you to study this suit combination to see the truth of that statement.

How does this work...? Well, East were to play low at trick one you make the ♦10 and later score the ♦A.

If East were to produce the ♦K you would take the ♦A and later make the ♦Q.

Finally, if East produces the ♦J you win with the ♦A and now have two of the top three Diamond honours with your ♦Q and ♦10, giving you the second Diamond trick you need.

If you make the mistake of playing the ♦Q from dummy at trick one and East covers with the ♦K

you will be vulnerable in Diamonds when you surrender the lead to knock out the ♠A. The danger will be if East has the ♠A and leads a Diamond *through* your ♦10 7.

Of course, you could duck the ♦K and duck the next Diamond. Now you go down if **West** has the ♠A and the long Diamonds...

This then is the play: you play the ♦4 from dummy and on this lie of the cards East actually produces the ♦K which you win with the ♦A. Now the hand is as easy as can be. You knock out the ♠A and can test the Hearts for a favourable break and an overtrick. Not today but nine tricks is quite enough, thank you.

The moral of these six deals? *Know your suit combinations!*