



Second hand play. Six defensive hands. ACOL bidding

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North	
♠ J2	
♥ QJT85	
♦ K8	
♣ QJ64	
West	East
♠ AK	♠ Q76
♥ 92	♥ AK7
♦ QJT95	♦ 7642
♣ AK97	♣ 832
South	
♠ T98543	
♥ 643	
♦ A3	
♣ T5	

The old adage "**Second player plays low**" comes to us from the days of whist. It gave sound advice to players of that game as there was no dummy hand so players had little idea of who had what. What about bridge, with twenty-six cards visible to each player? Does the advice still hold good here? If so, why? If not, why not?

Well, remember that the best position to be in on any trick is the last player to play (fourth hand, in other words). When you are second player to any trick then your partner will be the fourth player and, will be in the best position. In general, therefore, it is wise to leave the decision up to him. You do this by playing low – hence the **Second player plays low** adage.

In bridge, though, there are plenty of exceptions to this "rule" and you should be aware of them. This series (and an earlier series, also in this edition) will attempt to clarify when you should follow the rules and when you should break them.

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

Lead: ♥ 4

Let's start our postmortem by looking at the hand from East's point of view. He's declarer in 3NT and can see three Spades, two Hearts and two Clubs to begin with and he plans to establish the Diamonds for three tricks, giving him a total of ten winners. He's got lots of stoppers everywhere, and sees victory in his crystal ball.

However (*the best laid plans of mice and men...*) we have other plans. This is essentially a *tempo hand* in that we can get our suit going (Hearts) before declarer can get his suit going (Diamonds). The fact that we get the opening lead is all-important – we get to go first in the race. The problem we have in the defence is **not** to isolate the Heart suit in the North hand.

Our immediate defensive **Count** and **Plan** figures North for 10-11 points and declarer for about 8-9.

A glance at the dummy tells us that declarer is likely to use those Diamonds as a source of tricks. Declarer takes trick one in his hand with the ♥K and immediately leads a low Diamond at trick two. Decision time!

Our ♦A is our only entry, which means we only have one chance to lead to partner. Visualise with us what happens if we **don't** play our ♦A now.

Partner will end up taking the trick in his hand with the ♦K, and of course he'll lead a Heart. Declarer will **duck** the trick, and hold up till the third Heart trick to play his ♥A. Now, when he plays his next Diamond, and we take the trick, we have no Heart left to return to partner.

Having seen the problem, we come up with the counterplay. Rather than waste partner's precious entry, we go up with our ♦A at trick two and smartly return a Heart. Declarer is doomed. He forlornly holds up for a round but knows his cause is a hopeless one. He can count points too, and knows where the ♦K is.

We end up taking three Heart tricks and the ♦A and ♦K. **Second player plays low?** Maybe,

maybe not.



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VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

North	
♠ Q65	
♥ J63	
♦ 952	
♣ AT84	
West	East
♠ T72	♠ AJ4
♥ 52	♥ AKQ4
♦ AJT74	♦ 63
♣ 976	♣ KQJ3
South	
♠ K983	
♥ T987	
♦ KQ8	
♣ 52	

On this hand (and on the next) you are on opening lead.

Firstly you have to lead. Secondly, you have to be patient. Can you manage that?

West	North	East	South
-	-	2NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♥ T

We have to make the opening lead, and it brings home an important point. When you have no compelling lead (like partner's suit or a good five-card suit) and you are *sitting over* a big hand, you don't want to lead away from your honours. It's time for a passive lead. Note that a Spade lead would give declarer two Spade tricks (but only if he played *second hand low*...!)

In this case, *top of a sequence* is perfect. Other passive leads include leading trumps but in a No-trump contract, well....

When the dummy comes down, we take time to "Look at the dummy, dummy" and we see a long suit that should produce a number of tricks for declarer and is well-placed for East as the Diamond honours lie over the top of ours. Ouch.

Declarer has nowhere to go but Diamonds for his nine tricks. When he leads a Diamond at trick two, we have a decision to make. The reflex play may be to "split your honours" and play the ♦Q (or the ♦K if you feel strongly about it). However, if declarer reads the hand accurately he will **duck** this and subsequently be in a position to finesse the Diamonds on the next round and make *four* Diamond tricks. This you cannot afford.

So you have to bite your lip and play a low Diamond on this trick, allowing the ♦10 to score the trick. Declarer will then try to make some tricks out of Clubs, playing to the ♣J. Partner ducks, of course (**second hand low**, you may note).

Declarer tries a second Diamond, on which you have to split, winning the ♦A. Another Club is led and, again your partner ducks his ♣A (had partner played his ♣A "on thin air" he would have made declarer's life oh-so-easy).

Declarer is in a horrible position now – he has to hope that Clubs are 3-3 or that you will chuck a Heart away. When these chances fail to materialise he is down.

Bad luck, East...



Second hand play. Six defensive hands. ACOL bidding

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

West ♠ T72 ♥ 52 ♦ AJT74 ♣ 976		East ♠ AJ4 ♥ AKQ4 ♦ 63 ♣ KQJ3
North ♠ Q65 ♥ J63 ♦ Q95 ♣ AT84		
South ♠ K983 ♥ T987 ♦ K82 ♣ 52		

This deal is another of those eerie VuBridge deals that looks just like the previous one. Odd that.

So here you are again, on lead to 3NT with a collection of cards that looks just like the last one.

There is a small difference, though. Is it a significant one?

West	North	East	South
-	-	2NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♥ T

Same bidding, same lead, same hand... well, nearly a clone of Hand 2. Very nearly. East-West bid to 3NT and we prefer the passive ♥10 lead to 3NT rather than the attacking ♠3. Again, the Heart lead gives nothing away but the Spade lead would have given declarer an undeserved second trick in Spades.

When the dummy is exposed, we take a few seconds to "Look at the dummy, dummy" and we see a long suit that should produce a source of tricks for declarer. We note, with some anxiety, that if declarer has the ♦Q our ♦K is as dead as a dodo and that five Diamond tricks are going to fall into declarer's lap.

However.. declarer wins the Heart lead and tries the ♦3, which suggests that he doesn't have the ♦Q. (If he had it, he'd lead it – surely?) In order to grasp the killer defence, we need to take a second and see the hand from declarer's vantage point. He sees one Spade trick, three Hearts and one Diamond. He plans on using a *combination finesse* on the Diamonds, knowing that two missing honours usually split (like they have on this hand). He should get the rest of his tricks from the Diamonds.

When he leads a Diamond at trick 2, we have a big decision to make. We decide to play *second hand high* because:

1. Declarer didn't lead the ♦Q, strongly suggesting to us that it is in partner's hand.
2. If we play the ♦K, it will knock out the ♦A, which is declarer's only entry to the dummy, if we are right about the placement of the ♦Q.

This play looks so against the natural order of things that the position requires further study. If you *don't* play the ♦K then declarer has a cake-walk. He loses the first finesse to North's ♦Q but then has the suit all poised and ready to take four tricks at his convenience. Your ♦K is now worthless, whatever you do on the second round.

If you *do* play the ♦K the declarer is in a horrible position. Whatever he does (wins it or ducks it) his entries and communications have been shot to rubble. Your play wouldn't be worth a tinker's cuss if dummy had an outside entry but here it

doesn't. The Diamonds are wrecked and so is the contract.

Well, as we've so often told you, good things happen to people who do good things. Our plan works, and the rest of the hand is just a matter of taking our tricks as they come along.

Now the contrast between Hands 2 and 3 is important and most players would do the wrong thing on both of them. Not you, of course – but maybe your partners would.



Second hand play. Six defensive hands. ACOL bidding

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

North	
♠ A5	
♥ KT84	
♦ K98	
♣ 7542	
West	East
♠ 762	♠ KQJT83
♥ QJ5	♥ 62
♦ AQ62	♦ J3
♣ AK6	♣ QJ3
South	
♠ 94	
♥ A973	
♦ T754	
♣ T98	

The bidding here has the opponents sailing into game.

Still, can you gather together sufficient evidence to plan the defeat of declarer?

West	North	East	South
1♦	P	1♠	P
1NT	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ T

West opens 1♦ and rebids 1NT to show a balanced 15-16 points. East, holding a fine Spade suit and 10 points, tries his luck with 4♠.

With a Club sequence (the ♣10 9 8) we decide to lead that suit, hoping to lead through some vulnerable honours on the table. Nope, not today, although the lead gives nothing away to declarer.

First, let's look at this from the declarer's point of view. In 4♠ he's got a Spade loser, two Heart losers and one possible Diamond loser. He's hoping to set up a Heart trick as a place to **dump** a loser in hand; if he can't do that he'll fall back on the Diamond finesse.

As South we figure partner for 10 points at most, and with his honours **behind** the big hand, we may have a chance to set this. We just need to know *which* honours he has, if any. Of course, declarer could easily have all the missing high cards for his 4♠ bid and game could be easy.

Our Big Moment comes when declarer, after drawing trumps, leads a Heart to establish a slow trick there and provide a dumping ground. What cards might partner hold to beat 4♠? We know that we have no Club trick and only one Spade trick. What red honours will allow us to take four tricks in defence?

The answer is that North must have the ♥K and the ♦K and to take advantage of that we must play *second hand high* in order to fire a Diamond through the dummy.

With partner still holding the ♥K as an entry, it makes no difference should declarer go up with his ♦A. Because we rose with the ♥A to fire through a Diamond he cannot make 4♠. In practice, our defence forces declarer to try the Diamond finesse. Bad luck, sir. Not today.


Now, let's visualise what would happen if we were to play low on the first round of Hearts. North would take the trick and would have no lead. Even if he led a Heart back to us, it would be too little too late, as indeed dummy's ♥Q would now be established to take care of the Diamond loser.

So, is it time to ignore all these maxims? (**No**, but treat them with a certain respect and a certain amount of wariness).



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VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 6H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

North	
♠ JT764	
♥ 63	
♦ Q62	
♣ 752	
West	East
♠ K82	♠ AQ
♥ A85	♥ KQJT72
♦ KJ973	♦ T85
♣ K8	♣ A9
	
South	
♠ 953	
♥ 94	
♦ A4	
♣ QJT643	

Here you are defending a high-level contract. How might declarer **not** make his contract?

The key here is *to do your thinking in advance*.

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♥	P
2♦	P	3♥	P
4NT	P	5♥	P
6♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♣ Q

East-West blast their way into a fair but not great slam. After your ♣Q lead against 6♥ the whole contract depends on making a trick in Diamonds (or not losing two Diamond tricks – it amounts to the same thing).

It would be a very poor shot to lead the ♦A from your hand at trick one, by the way. Leading Aces against a slam is not bad practice in general (it's right sometimes, wrong other times) but it's not a good idea when the suit has been bid on your left. This suit is likely to be declarer's source of tricks and so you should be unwilling to surrender control in it.

Declarer wins the ♣K on table, draws takes a round of trumps, unblocks the ♠A Q, goes back to table with the ♥A and pitches a Diamond on the ♠K. Now he returns to his hand with the ♣A and leads the ♦10 towards dummy.

Crisis time. Do you/Don't you take the ♦A? Well, by now you know that this is a classic "King-Jack guess". Declarer has no way of knowing what to do if you play low smoothly on the ♦10. East is on a 50-50 shot for his contract – **provided you don't help him in any way**.

If you were to play the ♦A East would spread his cards and claim the rest. Oops! If you were to play small without a flicker declarer wouldn't know what to do – and half the time he would choose to play you for the ♦Q.

Note that staring at the ♦10, shuffling uncomfortably around, gazing at the ceiling, consulting with an invisible oracle and other foolish practices can only help declarer divine the position. *[And **NO**, you are not permitted to perform all these histrionics if you don't have the ♦A – that will get you banned from a Bridge Club faster than if you'd parked your car on the chairman's foot].*

Now, at the table you have to think fast. Actually, you should train yourself to think in advance. It isn't difficult to see that declarer is going to lead a Diamond towards dummy *sometime* in the hand. Your thought processes

must be directed towards that key question: *Will I play the ♦A or not?* When the time comes you are ready for it and can play with the right degree of nonchalance.

Note that on this hand you have no chance of a trick in any other suit. Accordingly, your only hope is to make two Diamond tricks and the only hope of that is a misguess by declarer.



Second hand play. Six defensive hands. ACOL bidding

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 6H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North	
♠ JT764	
♥ 63	
♦ QT8	
♣ 752	
West	East
♠ K82	♠ A9
♥ A85	♥ KQJT72
♦ K9763	♦ J52
♣ K8	♣ AQ
South	
♠ Q53	
♥ 94	
♦ A4	
♣ JT9643	

This deal looks suspiciously like Hand 5.

Do you get that odd feeling that you've seen this hand, these opponents, this bidding before...? Spooky.

However, does that mean that you should defend the deal in the same way as you did before?

If so, why? If not, why not?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♥	P
2♦	P	3♥	P
4NT	P	5♥	P
6♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♣ J

East-West blast their way into a poor slam. After your ♣J lead (better in principle than the ♦A after this bidding) the whole contract depends on a miracle lie in Diamonds or on a defensive mistake. The miracle lie in Diamonds, by the way, is to hope that you (South) started with ♦A Q alone. Possible, but you wouldn't want to bet your house on it, would you?

Anyway, declarer wins the ♣Q, draws takes two rounds of trumps, plays three rounds of Spades, ruffing the third round in hand, cashes the ♠A (crashing the ♠K on the table) and then leads a Diamond.

Crisis time. Do you/Don't you take the ♦A? Well, does it matter? Declarer has two losing Diamonds anyway, whatever South does. Look again. Suppose you (as South) play a low Diamond. Declarer has no choice but to play the ♦K and to play another Diamond. You win with the ♦A and play...? Well you only have Clubs left so that's not a difficult question. You play a Club – any Club. Unfortunately that gives declarer a **ruff-and-discard** and is usually good news only for declarer.

East will gleefully ruff with dummy's last trump and will throw away his last Diamond. His hand will consist only of winning trumps. Partner will sorrowfully shake his head as his "certain" winning Diamond (the ♦Q) will sleep with the fishes tonight.

How can you avoid this ignominy? By **not** playing *second player low*. There isn't a guess for declarer to get wrong and the play so far makes it clear that declarer started with two Spades, two Clubs, six Hearts and three Diamonds.

In a way, playing **second hand high** was an *unblocking* action, hoping to set up a possible winner in partner's hand. If we had ♦A × ×, we would have played second hand low.

The contrast between Hand 7 and Hand 8 is subtle yet still distinct. What you need to do is to keep your wits about you.

