



Second hand play. Two declarer play hands, four defensive hands.

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North
 ♠ A2
 ♥ AK6
 ♦ AT732
 ♣ KJ4

West
 ♠ QT864
 ♥ T5
 ♦ QJ84
 ♣ 82



East
 ♠ 973
 ♥ QJ942
 ♦ K6
 ♣ A63

South
 ♠ KJ5
 ♥ 873
 ♦ 95
 ♣ QT975

We return to an old theme. Old it might be but it is very important.

The hoary 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 exposed hand (no dummy hand in other words) 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, as such, is 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. Note that declarer should not have to follow any rules, regulations or old wives' tales – he can see his side's assets and can plan accordingly. It's the defenders who are unsure of themselves and should, on

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

Lead: S

Second hand low is often good advice, applying to both the defenders and to the declarer. But not always.

Here, North opens the bidding with 1♦ and, after our innocent little 1NT response (and what else could we respond on a miserable 6 points?) he raises us to game. When we see the dummy with its 19 points we understand why.

Our **Count** and **Plan** shows that we've got three top Spade tricks (the opening lead around into the ♠K J 5 has given us a cheap trick in the suit), two top Hearts, one top Diamond and no top Clubs, but the rest of our tricks will come from setting up the Clubs. If all works well, we might even have an overtrick for dessert.

However... as ever we must look before we leap or, in the case of all bridge hands, **Count** and **Plan** before playing a card to trick one.

At trick 1, if we run the Spade lead into our ♠K J 5, we will end up with no *entry* back to the closed hand where the long Clubs reside. When Spades are led again, we'll be trapped on the table with the ♠A. Now, everything would be fine and dandy if the opponents could be persuaded to take the ♠A on the first or second round but can we rely on their co-operation? Given that we should never rely on the largesse of the opposition it is best to give up the chance for an overtrick and settle for just two Spade tricks.

Note that we only need two Spade tricks for the contract – we can count two Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and four Clubs for nine in all.

So at trick one, we take the ♠A in dummy, and start on the Clubs. Wretched East holds up his ♣A until the third Club trick (good defense – remember to do that to him when roles are reversed!) and, at trick five, he returns his partner's Spade lead.

This shows the wisdom of our **second hand high** at trick one. We are able to win the lead in hand with the ♠K (except for those of you who tried for the guaranteed-to-fail Spade finesse), and proceed to take our Club winners. We then cash our two hearts and our Diamond for our

balance, play low in second seat. This series (and its brother, also in this edition) will attempt to clarify when you should follow the rules and when you should break them.

Hand 1. We start with two declarer-play hands just to set the scene. For the rest of the deals you will be sitting in defense. How should you play your game contract here?

nine tricks.


One additional point we'd like to make. For a moment, let's pretend that you've got ♠A 3 2 in dummy. If that were your holding opposite ♠K J 5, you would indeed play **second hand low** at trick one and run the Spade lead into the jaws of the ♠K J tenace. There would be no need **not** to go for that overtrick as the suit couldn't get *blocked*.



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VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 1 (SA Version)	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ Q9	
	♥ Q7	
	♦ QJT864	
	♣ K93	
West		East
♠ T863		♠ J742
♥ AK962		♥ J43
♦		♦ K95
♣ T752		♣ QJ6
	South	
	♠ AK5	
	♥ T85	
	♦ A732	
	♣ A84	

This is another declarer-play deal.

How should you play an ambitious game contract on this hand?

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

Lead: ♥ 6

You open the bidding with 1NT and partner raises that to 3NT. A low Heart lead from West (the ♥6) reveals that you have reached a hideous contract with only a small chance of success.

A **Count** of tricks shows there to be just six on top (three Spades, no Hearts, one Diamond, and two Clubs) so you will just have to bring in the Diamonds. However, what are you going to do with the Heart suit after this opening lead? It is entirely likely that Hearts break 5-3 in which case you are favorite to lose the first five Heart tricks. What is the correct card to play from dummy? **High** (the ♥Q) or **low** (the ♥7)?

Well, if you work it out it *cannot cost* to try the ♥Q. True, this will only work if West has underled the ♥A K but when will it be the wrong thing to do? If West has led from, say, ♥K J 9 6 2 then playing the ♥7 from the table won't help. East, it is true, will be forced to play the ♥A but the defenders will still take the first five tricks. Desperation play it may well be but trying the ♥Q is your only chance.

In passing, note that playing low from table would be the correct play had dummy held ♥Q 7 5 and you had ♥10 8. Now you would have a Heart trick if West had led from a suit headed by the ♥A J or the ♥K J, giving two chances against the one of playing the ♥Q and hoping West held the ♥A K and others.

Back to the plot... to your surprise and relief the ♥Q holds the trick. Now "all" you need to do is to pull in the Diamonds without loss. What is the right play here? Cash the ♦A, hoping that the ♦K falls singleton or run the ♦Q, hoping East has the offending ♦K?

Well, with ten cards missing the King the finesse is much the superior play. It works 50% of the time whereas playing the ♦A (hoping that the ♦K falls) works only half as often. So you run the ♦Q (fully aware that – should it lose – 3NT is in danger of being hit with an avalanche of Hearts). However, *mirabile dictu*, it wins. The bridge gods are positively grinning at you today. With West showing out you can finesse the Diamonds again and run the suit.

Astonishingly you emerge with twelve (count them, **twelve**) tricks and cannot complain about bad luck for at least a month.



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Second hand play. Two declarer play hands, four defensive hands.

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 1 (SA Version)	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North
 ♠ KT873
 ♥ 8
 ♦ QJ975
 ♣ J4

West
 ♠ AQ6
 ♥ 542
 ♦ T8
 ♣ QT962



East
 ♠ J4
 ♥ AKQ3
 ♦ AK32
 ♣ 873

South
 ♠ 952
 ♥ JT976
 ♦ 64
 ♣ AK5

You are defending now.

What is your assessment of the early play?
 How might you defend this hand?

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

Lead: ♥ J

You defend against 3NT and have an easy ♥J lead. Declarer wins the ♥A while North follows with the ♥8. Have you found a devastating opening lead? Is that ♥8 showing encouragement?

Anyway, East plays a Club at trick two and it's up to you...

Well you shouldn't rush in with the ♣K and fire back another Heart, that's for sure. *Where's the fire?* (By which we mean, what's the rush?) Partner cannot hold either ♥K Q 8 × or ♥K Q 8. With the former declarer would have opened 1NT with a singleton Ace and with the latter your partner would have *unblocked* the Hearts by playing the ♥Q on your ♥J. Best is to keep your powder dry and play a small Club – in tempo.

Declarer is not gifted with second sight. His best play in Clubs is to finesse against the ♣J, pulling in the suit for three tricks whenever you hold the Jack. Here, North wins the ♣J and things are starting to unravel for East.

North surprises you by switching to the ♦Q. This suggests that his ♥8 at trick one was not an encouraging card (or he would have cleared Hearts). Declarer wins the ♦A and plugs away in Clubs, so you take the ♣K and return partner's Diamonds (playing another Heart would be terrible defense). Declarer wins the ♦K and finally establishes the Clubs, partner signalling vehemently with the ♠10.

With that guiding light you play a Spade and declarer does his best by taking the ♠A and cashing his eight tricks for one off.



Second hand play. Two declarer play hands, four defensive hands.


VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 21/07/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

West	North	East	South
3♠	P	4♣	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ Q

West opens with a pre-emptive 3♠ and East raises that to 4♣. You know that West is likely to have seven good Spades and not much outside – dummy has plenty for his raise to game.

For once your partner finds a devastating opening lead – the ♥Q. Declarer, realizing his ♥K is toast, plays low to the first two tricks and allows you to take trick three with the ♥A. So you are off to a good start; all you need now is one more trick. You switch to a Club and let declarer get on with it. Having taken the ♣A on dummy, declarer now leads the ♠J off the table – how should you defend?

North		East
♠ QJT9		♠ J73
♥ J984		♥ K87
♦ KJT82		♦ AKQ
		♣ A753
West		South
♠ AK96542		♠ QT8
♥ 532		♥ A64
♦ 63		♦ T752
♣ 6		♣ Q94

You are defending against a rapidly bid contract here.

What are your thought processes?

How might you make the right number of defensive tricks?

Holding the ♠Q 10 (not to mention the ♠8) it may seem “automatic” to cover the ♠J with the ♠Q. It isn't – it's the wrong play. West has seven Spades – so North has none. How can covering the ♠J help your cause? What would happen is that declarer would take the ♠K, observe your partner's void, cross to the dummy and finesse the ♠9. Game over.

West has no intention of running the ♠J; he is trying a con-play. Look at it from his perspective. All he needs to do to make his contract is to play for a 2-1 Spade break. So he should lay down the ♠A K and claim his game 78% of the time (when trumps behave).

However, it *costs him nothing* to lead the ♠J off the dummy just to see the effect. If you were to play low he would revert to Plan A (cashing the ♠A K). If you were to make the egregious play of covering, though, then West would be able to call on Plan B and pick up the 3-0 break.


Just as well you didn't give the game away by covering or by staring at the ceiling and then playing low after about ten minutes...



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Second hand play. Two declarer play hands, four defensive hands.

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ KT98		
	♥ 973		
	♦ 54		
	♣ Q752		
West		East	
♠ QJ4		♠ A52	
♥ AKT84		♥ 62	
♦ T98		♦ AQ762	
♣ 93		♣ AJ8	
	South		
	♠ 763		
	♥ QJ5		
	♦ KJ3		
	♣ KT64		

You are defending (again) and have to defeat 3NT.

What are your plans?

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

Lead: C

You defend 3NT by leading the ♣4 to the ♣Q from North and declarer's ♣A. Partner's play of the ♣Q denies the ♣J so you know East started with the ♣A J (and probably at least one other).

Declarer's first play is a Heart towards dummy. What should you do?

Well, many defenders in this position split their honors, arguing that East will put in the ♥10 if they don't. This is wrong on so many levels. East is nervous about the Clubs and – as we have said so often – cannot see through the backs of the cards.

Playing the ♥10 is dangerous for East – should North win and fire a Club through the remaining ♣J × 3NT might well fail. East, in fact, has his focus on a completely different plan. He aims to make his tricks in Diamonds, taking the finesses into your hand. Should the first Diamond finesse lose he is safe from a Club attack from your hand.

So East takes dummy's ♥K and runs the ♦10 into your hand. You take the ♦J and have to find a play. Leading Clubs again is out of the question (it would only be right if East started with ♣A J alone) so you find a Spade shift. Declarer puts on the ♠Q, covered by the ♠K and ♠A. East now crosses to the ♥A and runs the ♦9. Had the missing Diamond honors been split then East would make four Diamond tricks and the contract. Nope, not today.

You win the ♦K and plug away in Spades, partner signalling encouragement with the ♠10. East can make no more than eight tricks now and has to surrender.


Yes, 3NT would have made had East put in the ♥10 at trick two. However, he is not psychic – he couldn't have known that. Had you split your honors, though, he might have woken up to the actual distribution and made his game.



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Second hand play. Two declarer play hands, four defensive hands.

VB#18 Year 2 Second hand low? Part 1 (SA Version)	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ T98	
	♥ AKJ75	
	♦ 52	
	♣ 873	
West		East
♠ AQ7		♠ KJ5
♥ QT3		♥ 96
♦ AQ6		♦ KJ974
♣ Q642		♣ K95
	South	
	♠ 6432	
	♥ 842	
	♦ T83	
	♣ AJT	

Some defending is easy – you just sit calmly on your chair and wait for declarer to go down.

On some deals, though, you need to put your thinking cap on and do something clever.

Which category does this deal fit into?

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

Lead: ♥ A

After a very brisk and uninformative auction, partner leads the ♥A against 3NT. Against a No-trump contract, that should mean a sequence of three, which can be broken at the bottom. North should have a suit headed by the either the ♥A K Q or the ♥A K J.

Before we start our own analysis, let's look at it from the declarer's point of view. He sees three Spade tricks and five Diamonds for sure. He has little hope for his ♥Q. His ninth trick is going to have to come from a Club. He is praying that either the ♣A is in North (his *safe opponent*), or if it is in South (that's us!), we will foolishly play **second hand low**.

At trick one, we signal discouragement by playing the ♥2. Partner switches to the ♠10 at trick two.

We have two small gems of information. First, North does **not** hold the ♥Q. Otherwise he'd still be firing away. Second, A count of points shows that North has 8-9. We now know that he has the ♥A K J (8 points) so he has at most one Jack outside his suit. But, Dr Watson, we can see them all! Therefore, North doesn't have a stitch outside his suit.

We now think how we can set the contract. Declarer smartly takes the trick in dummy with his ♠K, and at trick three, tries to steal his ninth trick by leading a Club toward his ♣Q, looking innocent and a little bored.

As we know, the bridge gods pay no more attention to us than the golf gods. We violate the ancient **second hand low** law, pop up with our ♣A, and then lead the ♥8. Why the ♥8? That's routine play with just two cards remaining.

End result? We take the ♣A and five Heart tricks. Another law violation...