



This is all about third hand play and Reading the Lead. Some deals make use of the Rule of Eleven.

VB#19 Year 2 Third Hand play Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North	
♠ J83	
♥ Q72	
♦ Q7632	
♣ K5	
West	East
♠ AQT	♠ K5
♥ J95	♥ AT6
♦ A4	♦ J98
♣ AJ832	♣ QT974
South	
♠ 97642	
♥ K843	
♦ KT5	
♣ 6	

This series of six deals (and another series to be found in this edition of V-Blue) is all about *third hand play* in defence. The basic idea is well known from that oft-quoted phrase "Third player plays high", an adage that comes to us from the days of whist. However, there is much more to this aspect of defense than simple phraseology.

In this series we are going to ask you to *Read the Lead* (what has dear old partner led from?) and to work out what to do. Should we play "Third player plays high" regardless? Should we return partner's suit when on lead?

Also contained within these series are deals that require applications of the *Rule of Eleven*. Assuming partner has led the fourth highest of a suit headed by an honour we can apply this famous rule to analyse the suit layout. If you are unfamiliar with the Rule of Eleven we will, as ever, talk you through it.

The first few deals are easy enough but – be warned! – they get tougher.

Hand 1 is gentle, just to get you into the mood.

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

Lead: ♦ 3

This deal throws up a common card combination. East-West start off with 1♣ – 3♣ and West decides (with 16 points) to take a pot at 3NT. North leads the ♦3.

From your perspective as South that might be from a four-card suit or a five-card suit (it depends where the ♦2 is) but at least you know that North has an honour or two. With a fistful of low Diamonds North would not have led fourth highest – the modern style is to lead the second highest to disclaim interest in the suit. Anyway, North might have the ♦A, the ♦Q or – on a good day – the ♦A Q. What is the correct card to play when declarer calls for dummy's ♦8 at trick one?

Many players, with the "third player plays high" rule ringing in their ears, would make the error of playing the ♦K here. In fact that is never right, regardless of who has what in Diamonds.

If partner has the ♦A and declarer the ♦Q you have given West an early Diamond trick it is true but declarer was always destined to get a trick in the suit – it makes little difference that you concede an early trick rather than a later trick.

If – as here – North has the ♦Q the play of the ♦10 is essential. If you were to play the ♦K then the ♦J on table would be a sure second stopper for declarer. On this layout playing the ♦10 forces the ♦A and the defenders have four Diamond tricks to take as well as the ♣K.

As it happens, declarer ducks the ♦10 (probably a small error on his part, although that is definitely not your concern). You hasten to play the ♦K back at trick two (a low Diamond, you should note, would block the suit) and the defenders have an easy time of it cashing five winners once the Club finesse loses.

Tough bananas, West. Better luck next time.



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VB#19 Year 2 Third Hand play Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

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

Lead: ♠ 2

East-West reach 3NT after West has shown a strong balanced hand and North (with a dismal collection) kicks off with the ♠2. How should you defend as South?

Well, if we **Read the Lead** it is evident that North has four Spades headed by an honor. A count of points shows that North has very little in the way of points – 3 is about par for the course. So how should you defend?

The "obvious" defence is to take the ♠A and return the ♠10. Let's see what happens if you try that. West allows that to run to the ♠J so North wins his ♠Q and clears the Spades. West then runs the ♦J to you (he has to develop Diamonds to make his nine tricks) and you take you ♦Q. Now what? Well, there is nothing you can do to defeat the contract. You take the ♦A in due course and West mops up the rest. North has a winning Spade but no prospect of ever getting on lead to cash it.

Now try an alternative play – that of playing the ♠10 at trick one. Nothing is lost if North has ♠K × × × as West has a Spade trick in any case. The gain comes here when West has the ♠K. West daren't let your ♠10 hold – for all he knows North has the ♠A Q poised over the ♠K.

So he takes his King and finesses the ♦J and that's one down. You cash the ♠A, play a Spade to partner's ♠Q and – crucially – partner is on lead to cash the last Spade. The ♦A is the defence's fifth trick.

Easy when you see it and...

North ♠ Q862 ♥ J65 ♦ 832 ♣ 972		East ♠ J95 ♥ A8 ♦ KT975 ♣ JT4	
West ♠ K73 ♥ KQ9 ♦ J64 ♣ AKQ3			
South ♠ AT4 ♥ T7432 ♦ AQ ♣ 865			

How do you plan to defeat an opposition game here?

Grab some tricks early or sit back and wait?



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VB#19 Year 2 Third Hand play Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North	
♠ K9764	
♥ KT8	
♦ J2	
♣ 952	
West	East
♠ 532	♠ QJ
♥ AJ5	♥ 932
♦ A864	♦ KQ5
♣ AJ3	♣ KQT84
	
South	
♠ AT8	
♥ Q764	
♦ T973	
♣ 76	

Just to refresh your memory: When the opening lead is **not** the second highest from a poor suit nor the top of a sequence, it is usually the fourth-highest-from-the-longest-and-strongest.

To apply the *Rule of Eleven* we subtract the **rank of the card** led from 11, and that is the number of cards higher held by the other three players. Clear? Maybe, maybe not...

For example, partner leads the 7. We perform the simple sum $11 - 7$ and come up with the answer 4. So the Rule tells us that there are **four** cards higher than the 7 shared amongst the dummy, your hand and declarer's hand.

This tells you how many cards higher than the 7 reside in declarer's hand. This information may be crucial to a successful defence.

On this deal (Hand 2) can you work out who has what in Spades? In short, can you **Read the Lead**?

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

Lead: ♠ 6

West again plays in 3NT and North leads the ♠6. How, as South, should you defend this hand?

Well, the **Rule of Eleven** might be applied here. $11 - 6 = 5$ so there are five Spades higher than the 6 in the other three hands (in East, South and West in this case).

Here, you can see them all (the ♠Q J on table and the ♠A 10 8 in hand). This tells you that West has no Spade higher than the ♠6. Of course, this assumes that North is leading the fourth highest of his longest and strongest. If he has chosen to lead the ♠6 from, say, ♠9 6 5 3 2 then all your calculations will prove fruitless. However, why be such a pessimist?

You have excellent prospects of running off the Spades. So you take your ♠A and play back a Spade at trick two. The "trick" though, is that you must play back the ♠10. Many players in the past have decided not to "waste" the precious Ten and have sent back the ♠8 at trick two. Oops! Calamity. North takes the ♠K, plays a third round of Spades and then South's ears start to burn as he realises that he has blocked the suit. After a brief hiatus there is an icy remark along the lines of "It's your lead, partner" from North and South realises that he has done it in. Unable to lead a Spade South fishes something else out and declarer claims his contract.

In these circumstances it is important to lead back the higher card from two remaining, both to enable partner to count the suit and – as in this case – to unblock it.

True, on some cloudy days declarer will have ♠9 × × and the play of the ♠10 will give declarer an undeserved Spade trick. Well, on this deal the Rule of Eleven makes it clear that this is not the case.



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VB#19 Year 2 Third Hand play Part 1 ACOL

Date: 07/10/2015

Dealer: West

[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N

By: West

Board #: 4

Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ J73	
	♥ J84	
	♦ KJ752	
	♣ J6	
West		East
♠ A984		♠ KQ5
♥ KT65		♥ A73
♦ 94		♦ Q86
♣ AQ7		♣ KT84
	South	
	♠ T62	
	♥ Q92	
	♦ AT3	
	♣ 9532	

Here, the Rule of Eleven may be of use again in planning the defence.

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

Lead: ♦ 5

The auction is nothing special, but a 1NT – 3NT auction suggests a major suit lead if there are alternatives.

However, North chooses to lead the ♦5. Our **Count** and **Plan** as defenders begins when we *Read the Lead*. It's definitely fourth down from along suit, but we're not sure if North has a four-card or five-card suit. Let's apply the **Rule of Eleven**.

$11 - 5 = 6$, so there are six cards higher than the ♦5 in dummy, declarer and our hands. We see three in dummy and two in our hand. What can declarer hold? Exactly one card higher than the ♦5.

Well, we can't see the ♦7, ♦9, ♦J or ♦K. If declarer's high card is the ♦K or ♦J, declarer is always going to get one Diamond trick if we play the ♦10. But, if declarer's "high" card is any of the others, we can collect all the Diamond tricks.

The correct card to play on dummy's ♦6 is the ♦10 so that's what we do, and *mirabile dictu*, it holds the trick.

At trick two, we need to play our ♦A or we'll block the suit.

At trick three, we lead our last Diamond and find to our delight that declarer shows out. That means partner has five Diamonds and the first five tricks are ours.

After we take the first five Diamond tricks, the rest belong to declarer, but it's another case of too little too late.

Our big decision in this hand was how high should we play at trick one. We know partner has honour(s) in the suit, and it has to be the ♦J and/or the ♦K. We have to use our ♦10 to flush out honours in declarer's hand, if he has any. To play our ♦A would be a waste. In fact, the ♦10 is the right card to play regardless of whether declarer has the ♦J, the ♦K or any other holding...

One final thought: If we only had a Diamond doubleton, we would of course have to play our ♦A first to unblock. But you knew that, didn't

you?



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VB#19 Year 2 Third Hand play Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

North	
♠ JT983	
♥ QT43	
♦ K6	
♣ 85	
West	East
♠ 652	♠ A4
♥ K7	♥ 862
♦ AJ984	♦ QT2
♣ AJT	♣ KQ764
South	
♠ KQ7	
♥ AJ95	
♦ 753	
♣ 932	

As a declarer, you should have learned the importance of visualising the hand as a whole to help you plan the order in which you need to play the cards.

Is it any different as a defender? Certainly not! If you want to defeat the opponents you are going to need to look into your crystal ball and see into the future...

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

Lead: ♠ J

East-West reach game after an invitational sequence. West only has 13 points but he has a playable five-card suit and that probably induced him to have a shot at game.

North's opening lead of the ♠J indicates the top of a three-card sequence. We're not positive if it's from four or five (or even six!) cards, but we can be sure that it can't be from two or three cards. The fact that the West didn't bid Spades initially means that he can have at most four of them.

Our **Count and Plan** shows we have at least three Spade tricks and the ♥A. We need one more to break the contract.

We have to think carefully and visualise the later play to decide what to do at trick one when declarer takes the ♠A at trick one. It's tempting to follow with the ♠7, thinking of the ♠K and ♠Q as established winners.

However... the ♠K Q are equal with partner's Spades. If we are smart enough to play the ♠K at trick one, we promise North the ♠Q and we are also **unblocking** the suit. This is an essential part of this defence.

Let's take a minute out from our defender thinking, and look at this hand from the declarer's point of view. He sees his contract coming from five Club tricks, the ♠A and either four (or if the Diamond finesse actually **works**) or five Diamond tricks. Not an outrageous dream, is it?

When the declarer runs the ♦Q at trick two and the finesse loses to partner's ♦K, it's all over, but only *because we unblocked a Spade honour at trick one*. Now partner should lead a low Spade at trick three (the ♠8 for choice) but he rather excitedly leads the ♠10 (who said, "always lead the top of a sequence"?)

This gives us another chance to make a mess of the defence by letting that win the trick but we have already made a secure **Plan** for the Spade suit. Accordingly, we continue to unblock by putting the ♠Q on it.

At that point, we really should cash the ♥A

before allowing partner to enjoy his Spades. However, just to show that partner isn't the only one who makes subtle errors, we immediately return his suit. We now have two discards to make on which we should signal what we want partner to lead.

At trick five, the best discard (think of it as the most dramatic) is the ♥J ("*Please, please, lead one of these*"). On the next trick we throw the ♣2

This high card in Hearts is so clear that it could be seen from outer space; partner gets the message so we make the ♥A for two down. (We end up with four Spade tricks, the ♦K and ♥A.)

We might have got the message across to partner by throwing the ♣2 and the ♣3 but the actual signal would have woken up the most comatose of partners.

Now, let's pause awhile and see what would have happened had we **not** unblocked a Spade honour at trick one.

North would have won the ♦K at trick two and we would have taken our ♠K and ♠Q and the ♥A. That, however, would have been the end of the party; we would have wrecked our defensive communication and we would have handed the contract to the opponents with a big pink ribbon, tied in a bow.


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VB#19 Year 2 Third Hand play Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

		North		
		♠ QT87		
		♥ T62		
		♦ J4		
		♣ T752		
West		East		
♠ 65		♠ K43		
♥ K54		♥ Q87		
♦ AQ5		♦ K9872		
♣ AQJ63		♣ K4		
		South		
		♠ AJ92		
		♥ AJ93		
		♦ T63		
		♣ 98		

It's the same old story.

Read the Lead. Then work out who has what and – finally – find a devastating defence.

Not too difficult really...?

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

Lead: ♠ 7

After a routine auction to 3NT, our partner leads the ♠7 and we pause to reflect on the sight of dummy. When you are in third hand, your first job is to **Read the Lead**.

Partner's lead certainly cannot be from a five-card suit. Why not? Then declarer would have a singleton, and wouldn't have rebid 1NT. Therefore it's fourth best from a four-carder.

Next, we apply the "Rule of Eleven." $11 - 7 = 4$. There are four Spades higher than the ♠7 in the other three hands. We see one in dummy and we've got three. That means declarer hasn't a single card higher than the ♠7.

It means (if we can be bothered to go the extra mile) that partner must have precisely ♠Q 10 8 7. Exact calculations like this are rarely necessary at the table as the Rule of Eleven has done all the hard work for you.

So, what should we play at trick one? We can actually play the ♠2, knowing North's ♠7 will win the trick. This is the key play in this hand.

If we were to overtake partner's ♠7 (presumably with the ♠J), we would be stymied at the next trick. We would either have to turn dummy's ♠K into a winner or abandon Spades altogether. If we switched suits declarer would have a whale of a time running off all of his minor suit winners and claiming his contract with overtricks.

Normally, a third-hand play of the ♠2 would be a **discouraging** signal, asking partner to switch suits, and we might notice a brief furrowing of North's brow when he sees the ♠2 (isn't it great to have a partner who actually **looks** at the cards you play?) When he sees the ♠7 hold though, he is unlikely to do anything else but play another Spade.

Defenders must also count their tricks. We know we've got all four Spade tricks sewn up tight. The fifth and setting trick will come from our ♥A. It doesn't seem likely that our ♥A will disappear, but we've all had the rats get at our winners too often to resist taking that setting

trick before sending the last Spade back to partner.

Besides, why torture the poor declarer? Take your tricks and let him have the rest.

Does the Rule of Eleven always defeat the contract? No, of course not, but part of your job is to place the cards in the suit led (**Read the lead**, remember?). The Rule of Eleven often helps you do that, and it only takes a second. If you ever think that the Rule of Eleven fails you, fear not, it means partner's lead was not from fourth best.