

Hand

Hand

Hand

Hand

Ed Rawlinson  
San Antonio, Texas  
13 November, 2021

## Why spend time on “second hand low” ?

- Failure to follow it at the right time is the most common error inexperienced players make.
- Even players with 2,000 masterpoints sometimes go wrong.
- Exceptions?

Why is it generally good to play low in second hand?

- It's better if your Aces capture their honor cards rather than their spot cards.
- Ditto for your kings and queens.
- If you are in second seat, then your partner is in fourth seat. She may in a better position to capture their honor cards.

“Second hand low” has greater validity against NT contracts. Here are examples, special cases and exceptions.

Dummy (N)	A. Q43	B. Q43	C. Q103
West	A65	K65	K65
South's Lead	2	2	2

A. Play low. Suppose South has K43. Playing the Ace gives South two tricks.

B. Play low. Suppose South has J85. Playing the Ace gives South an eventual winner.

C. Play low. If South has the Ace, partner surely has the Jack. If South had the AJ2, she would go to dummy and lead an honor, finessing against East. Declarer doesn't know who has the King and who has the Jack. Make her guess.

Dummy (N)	D. KQJ3	E. A104
West	A654	QJ5(3)
South's Lead	2	2

- D. Play low. How you defend depends on whether dummy has another entry. If there is no outside entry, look for partner's count signal. That will tell you when to take your ace. If there is an outside entry, duck again if South leads the suit again. Suppose South holds 82. If you take the Ace, South will have 3 winners. If you duck twice, South only gets 2 winners.
- E. If you have 3, play the Jack. This guarantees you get a trick in case South has the Ace and plans to play the 10. If you have 4, play low. Your only chance for 2 winners is for South to play dummy's Ace.

Suppose you are declarer in 3N and you need 2 tricks in the suit shown below. You have multiple entries to the South hand. There are no clues from the bidding or prior play. How would you play the suit?

KQ10

943

This is a special case. When you see KQ10 in dummy and you hold Axx, remember WHAT TO DO. Thinking ahead allows you to duck smoothly, not giving declarer any clues from your body language. Declarer hopes to get two tricks. He must guess where the Jack is.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KQ10</b></p> <p><b>J862</b>                      <b>A75</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>943</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KQ10</b></p> <p><b>A86</b>                      <b>J752</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>943</b></p>
<p>Suppose South leads low and plays the King. You must duck. If you play the Ace, south has no choice but to finesse the 10 later. However, if you smoothly duck, he must guess the next time.</p>	<p>When South leads toward dummy, you must duck the first time and the second time. Doing so makes South guess. Playing the Ace on the first or second trick gives South 2 tricks.</p>

South is declarer after 1N-2C-2D-4N-6N.  
Partner leads the DJ. South wins the K and leads the H3 to the K,  
West playing  
the 5. What do you play?

S-A864

H-KQ42

D-A7

C-KJ4

S-1075

H-A86

D-8643

C-765



S-A864

H-KQ42

D-A7

C-KJ4

S-1075

H-A86

D-8643

C-765

S-KQJ

H-1093

D-KQ52

C-AQ8

Dummy has 17; you have 4; South showed 17 (or a good 16). That's 38, maybe 37. That leaves 2 or 3 for partner. In addition to the DJ, partner might have the SJ or HJ or SQ or CQ.

You should play low on the first heart. Partner may have the Jack. If South has the 1093 (as in this case), she will have to guess what to play on the second round.

## What if declarer leads an honor?

Dummy (N)	A. KQ643 no outside entry	B. KQ643 no outside entry
You (W)	A75	A7
Declarer (S)	J	J

- Now there's another slogan to consider: "cover an honor with an honor." The correct play depends on the circumstances.
- A. Play low. Watch partner's count signal. Win the second or third round based on what partner shows. Sometimes it's not clear after the first card played. For example, the 8 from partner may be low from 1098 or high from 82. If so, it's better to duck the second round. Better to give up 1 extra trick than 3.
- B. Play low. If declarer has 3, it makes no difference what you do. If she has 2, then winning the second trick holds declarer to 1 trick rather than 2.

Dummy (N) (with entries)	A. KQ64(2)	B. AQ73	C. AQ1092	D. AQ106
You (W)	A3	K6(5)	K65	K432
Declarer (S)	J	J	J	J

A. Play the Ace. Partner may have 10xxx.

B. Play the king. Partner may have 10xx(x).

C. Play low. If you cover, dummy will be good. Your only hope is that the Jack is singleton.

D. Play low. If you cover, dummy will be good unless partner has 9xxx. You hope that declarer has Jx. If so, ducking will hold him to 3 tricks.

# What about suit contracts?

- In NT contracts, if you choose to play “second hand low” with your Ace or king, you will almost always have a chance to win the Ace or king later.
- In suit contracts, there may be only one chance to win with your high card. A common example is when dummy has Qx in a side suit, and declarer leads toward the Q while dummy still has trumps. Declarer may well have Axx and plans to ruff the third round if his Q is not a winner.

Dummy (N) (side suit)	A. Q4	B. Q76	C. K3		
You (W)	K76(3)	K109(4)	A864		
Declarer (S)	2	2	2		

A. Play the king. Declarer may have A52.

B. If this occurs fairly early in the hand, play the king. Declarer may have A2 and wants to see if the queen is a winner. If it occurs late in the hand, play the 9.

Declarer may have J83. With such a holding, declarers tend to postpone initiating play in the suit, hoping that defenders will “break” the suit.

C. Play low. Declarer may have Qxx. Don’t set up two winners.

Dummy (N)	D. K753	E. KQ4 @trick 2 w/side entry
You (W)	AJ84	AJ10876
Declarer (s)	2	2

D. Play low unless there's some reason to believe the 2 is singleton.  
E. Play low. If the 2 is singleton, playing the Ace gives dummy 2 winners. Play the Ace if it will be the setting trick.

Is second hand low only for defenders?  
No, it is an important tool for declarer also.

Consider the following situations confronting declarer in 3N  
with the lead of the 2 in a suit

Dummy	A. J3	B. J3	C. Q4
Declarer	AK4	A104	A10

- A. Play the Jack. It's the only chance to win 3 tricks.
- B. Play low. This guarantees 2 winners.
- C. It's a guess. If you think West has led from the King, play the Queen. Otherwise play low. Sometimes there's a clue from the bidding or lead.

Dummy	D. Q3	E. A93	F. Q54
Declarer	A54	K104	A3

D. Play the queen. It's the only chance to win 2 tricks.

E. Playing low creates the opportunity to win 3 tricks in the suit. However, if the K is the only entry to a long, one-loser suit in dummy, play the Ace.

F. It depends on the circumstances. For example, if you have 4 sure losers in the other suits, play the queen. On the other hand, if you can afford to lose 1 in the suit led and may prevent LHO from regaining the lead (to lead through the Qx), you should play low. See following example.



N E S W

1C P 1H P

1S P 3N All Pass

OL:D2

S-AK43

H-32

D-Q54

C-AJ102

S-J102

H-AK95

D-A3

C-Q93

Dummy	A. 102	B. AK432/432/AJ2/AQ
Declarer	QJ83	QJ65/A65/93/10864

- A. Declarer is playing a NT contract and receives the lead of the 4 in the suit shown. Playing low from dummy guarantees 2 tricks. If the 10 is played, East wins the king and returns the 7. South plays the Jack; West plays the 5. West, who started with A954, now has the A9 behind declarer's Q8. East later regains the lead to lead through South, who ends up with only 1 trick in the suit.
- B. The contract is 4S; the lead is D4. South should play the 2 from dummy. This works when West led from K10xx or Q10xx. The Jack works only if West led from KQxx. West wins the Q and returns a heart. South wins, pulls trumps, and finesses the DJ, allowing South to discard a heart on the diamond Ace.

Ed Rawlinson  
a.k.a. Professor  
Emeritus

[edrawlinson@satx.rr.com](mailto:edrawlinson@satx.rr.com)