

Defensive Play of the Hand
Maximizing Results

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Defenders have many methods of maximizing their defensive result by minimizing the number of tricks that Declarer can muster. Signaling attitude and count and the use of “Deductive” reasoning are among the most important. Some of the more common circumstances which result with the placement of the cards being such that these types of skills come into play are as follows.

- **The Hold-Up:** In the following layout of the cards, Declarer, South, leads the King in the suit shown, while playing a No-Trump contract. Your Partner, West, plays the “9”. What reasoning can be applied by you using this information to best defend under these circumstances, and where are the “865”?

	<u>DUMMY</u>	
	QJT73	
<u>PARTNER</u>		<u>YOU</u>
9		(?)A42
	<u>DECLARER</u>	
	K	

- What is Declarer likely attempting to do?
 - What effect would the presence or absence of Dummy’s available outside entries have on the outcome of this situation?
 - How can Partner, playing in the West, best assist under these circumstances?
 - What is the significance of Partner’s having played the “9”?
- **Missing Honor:** In the following layout, Declarer, South, plays the Queen towards the Dummy in the suit shown. What factors dictate your second-hand play to the current trick?

	<u>DUMMY</u>	
	J73	
<u>YOU</u>		<u>PARTNER</u>
(?)A86		????
	<u>DECLARER</u>	
	Q	

1. Under normal circumstances, what card should you, in the second seat, play?
2. What mitigating circumstances, if any, might preclude your playing low, and cause you to consider winning the trick immediately with the Ace?

- **Untitled Tricks:** Declarer leads the “3” from the Dummy as shown.

	<u>DUMMY</u> Q73	
<u>YOU</u> ???		<u>PARTNER</u> AJ2
	<u>DECLARER</u> ????	

1. What card, with these holdings, should you, in the second seat play, and why?

- **Telegraphing Information:** Declarer leads towards the **KJ73** in the Dummy as shown.

	<u>DUMMY</u> KJ73	
<u>YOU</u> A52		<u>PARTNER</u> ????
	<u>DECLARER</u> 6	

1. What card should you, in the second seat play, and why?

- **Covering an Honor with an Honor:** Declarer leads the Queen from Dummy as shown.

	<u>DUMMY</u> QJ73	
<u>PARTNER</u> ???		<u>YOU</u> K864
	<u>DECLARER</u> ????	

1. Should you in second seat, cover the Queen, or not; and if yes, why, and if not, why not?

Answers

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A. The Hold-Up: 1. Declarer is attempting to set up winners through promotion of his QJT by playing from the short side first in order to eliminate the Ace.

2. If Dummy holds entries outside the suit being played, it is, most likely, immaterial when the Ace is played. If there are no outside entries, however, holding up or not will have **major impact!**

3. When an Opponent breaks a new suit, Partner's obligation is to give "count."

(**"WHEN DECLARER LEADS A NEW SUIT, DEFENDERS MUST GIVE COUNT."**)

4. Partner's "9" is either a singleton or the start of a "high-low" signal showing an even number of cards in the suit; i.e., two or four. If Partner holds just a singleton in the suit, then Declarer's holds 4-pieces and you can never hold up long enough to thwart Declarer's attempt to set up and run the suit. If Partner holds a doubleton, Declarer holds three pieces and you must hold up twice in order to block Declarer's entry into the Dummy.

B. Missing Honor: 1. If Declarer holds the King the only effect as to when you play the Ace is whether or not you allow the Jack to become a possible entry into the Dummy. Partner, however, could hold the King, and it might be a singleton. You should, therefore, under most circumstances, play low. **"SECOND-HAND USUALLY PLAYS LOW!"**

2. You might, however, desire to take the trick immediately if:

A: you desire to give Partner a quick ruff, especially if the suit shown is the trump suit.

B: you desire to draw trumps, or to run outside pre-established winners.

C: you might wish to lead through Dummy's existing tenace in a side suit, especially if Partner has signaled a suit preference for that particular suit.

C. Untitled Tricks: 1. If Declarer holds the King, playing your Ace on the first trick will promote one additional trick for the Opponents, a trick to which they otherwise would not be entitled. The King is missing! Play small! If Partner holds it, your side will take the trick anyway. If Declarer holds the King, he/she is always entitled to one trick in the suit anyhow. Even, under the most obscure circumstances, if Declarer were to hold a singleton King, Declarer would subsequently secure a sluff on the promoted Queen even if you, "Double Dummy," were to capture the singleton King. Playing small on trick one will result in your side securing two tricks and Declarer only one, whereas the opposite will occur if you play the Ace immediately!

D. Telegraphing Information: 1. Play the "2" **without hesitation.** Partner may, although it is remote, the singleton Queen, but by playing without hesitation, Declarer, absent the Queen may finesse the Jack and lose two tricks in the suit. If Declarer holds the Queen your Ace will take one trick later, in most instances, anyhow. **"Second Hand usually plays low."**

Whenever the Dummy is first tabled, try to think, before the fact, what you would do under any imaginable circumstance throughout the eventual play of the cards so that all of your plays are made with equal tempo, and without hesitation.

As an aside, seeing a Dummy as shown above, and with cards as held by West, under-leading the Ace is an excellent play if you suspect Partner may hold the Queen.

E. Covering an Honor with an Honor:

1. Play small! Do not cover the first honor in this instance! Normally, second hand plays low, but the exception to this is that “**covering an honor with an honor**” supersedes this principal. If, however, there be two honors in sequence, one should cover the second one, *not the first*, in case Partner holds a missing singleton Honor, the Ace in this instance.