

Second Hand High

The Old Bridge Saying Says ...

- “Second hand low, third hand high.”
 - This is often good advice, but ...
 - There are several situations in which it’s not so good.
 - Learn those situations and watch your game improve!
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- (Note that the hands accompanying these bullet points can be found in your handout.)

Situation 1. Taking the Setting Trick(s) Already Established

- In a pairs game, we want *all* the tricks possible
 - Therefore, we sometimes duck the setting trick in the hopes of getting *two* tricks
 - Good declarers use this to their advantage
 - High matchpoint scores can be achieved by ducking that setting trick and taking two more, instead
 - High matchpoint scores can be achieved by *cashing* that setting trick
- In these situations, track results over time
- Experience counts!
- Today, pretend you're in a team game – set the contract!

Principles

- In team games – or money bridge – set the contract.
- In matchpoint games, do you set the contract or try for more tricks?
 - You *must* be able to count declarer's tricks. You can't make this decision without that information.
 - A knowledge of your opponents' playing tendencies helps – but don't depend on this information alone.
- As declarer, make the crucial play *before* the defenders develop a good picture of the hand.

Situation 2. Setting Tricks Have Not Been Established

- To set a contract with side suit tricks requires
 - That the suit be established
 - That an entry to the hand with the established tricks exists
- *If* you hold the side suit, try not to use your entry before that suit is established
- *If* your partner holds the side suit, use your entry to establish partner's suit
 - *Before* partner's entry is removed, and
 - *Before* your cards in partner's suit have been removed

Pointers

- The shorter you are in partner's suit, the more imperative it is that you win a trick early to lead a card in that suit.
- If you win your trick when you no longer hold a card in partner's suit, you may have lost the chance to set the contract.
- As declarer, this is the principle behind hold-up plays. Wait to win a trick in the opponents' danger suit until one of the defenders is out of that suit.

Situation 3. Don't Let Declarer "Steal" a Trick

- Sometimes declarer needs to “steal” a trick to make his contract.
 - This trick may need to be taken *before* the defenders have a picture of the hand.
 - This trick may need to be taken to disrupt the defenders’ communication.
 - This trick may need to be taken to disrupt the defenders’ *tempo*.
- As declarer, “steal” the trick as soon as possible. You have a much better chance of success if the defenders don’t know that’s what you’re doing.

Pointer

- It is seldom right to defend in such a way that you leave yourself with the singleton ace of trumps.

Situation 4. Split Your Honors to Guarantee a Trick

- With two touching honors in a suit, it *may* be right to “split” them, if it guarantees a trick in the suit.
- Play the *lower* of the two honors. You would play the highest card in an honor card sequence (three or more). This helps partner identify your holding in the suit – and by extension, declarer’s.
- If two or more higher honors are on your left, splitting your own honors *might* allow declarer to pick up the suit.
- If the holding in the suit is short in the hand to your left (Ax or Kx, for example), it’s likely that declarer plans to play high. Splitting your own honors *might* cost you a trick.

A Reminder for Your Partner

- When second hand plays *before* declarer's hidden hand, it's often correct to make the same play you would make with that hand if you were playing *before* dummy.
- BUT, if you're playing before the dummy, you can see the cards that will follow your play.
- Second hand play is not always obvious when you're playing before the *hidden* hand.

Hand Types Are Not Always Obvious

- To take the setting trick – or not
- To grab a trick to set up yours or partner's suit – or not
- To keep declarer from stealing a trick – or not
- To split your honors – or not
- These situations may be combined in one hand
- And *both* defenders may be on the hot seat

Situation 5. You Need to Disrupt Declarer's Transportation

- If there is a long suit in dummy *and* declarer has no outside entry to that suit, start thinking about ways to limit declarer's use of that suit.
- As second hand, with a sure trick in that suit, win the trick when declarer holds no more cards in the suit. *Watch partner's count signal!*
- As second hand, with a useless honor in that suit, consider sacrificing that honor to allow partner to control declarer's transportation.

Situation 6. You Need to Unblock to Prevent an End Play

- It's hard to sacrifice honor cards, but ...
- If winning a trick means giving up at least one trick, maybe ...
- Winning that trick isn't such a good idea.
- If you have most of the defense's high card points, you're in danger of being end-played.

Second Hand Should Also Play High ...

- When holding an honor card sequence. Play the same card you would play if you were leading the suit. After all, you *are* the first hand to play in your partnership.
- When covering an honor with an honor – *but only if the play is likely to generate a trick for your side.*

Second Hand High Summary

- When taking the setting trick(s)
- When establishing partner's tricks – while you still can
- When declarer is trying to “steal” a trick
- When splitting your honors to guarantee your side a trick
- When it's necessary to disrupt declarer's transportation
- When it's necessary to avoid an end play
- When holding an honor card sequence in the suit led
- When covering an honor with an honor – if it's likely to guarantee your side a trick

Remember!

- There are exceptions to all these “rules.”
- If it’s the right play when dummy is to your left, it’s probably the right play when declarer is to your left – but it’s not as easy to see.
- Think about second hand play *before* you’re called upon to make it. Sometimes the incorrect play, if made smoothly, still yields a good result – and you haven’t committed an impropriety.
- As declarer, make your crucial play *before* the defenders know the situation.