

SECOND HAND HIGH by Maritha Pottenger

There are certain circumstances when it is essential for second-hand to play HIGH, not low.

When you can see that Declarer has stripped the hand and is getting ready to end-play your partner, play as high as possible if you are second hand. Example: Dummy holds: QJxx xxx AKx xxx and the contract is 6S. Declarer pulls trumps (leaving one in dummy) & eliminates clubs & diamonds, ending in dummy. When Declarer plays a heart, play your highest heart. It is your only chance to rescue partner from an end-play.

Sometimes it is right to “split” equal honors to ensure a trick. Other times, it is wrong. If you hold QJ52 and Dummy has K103, it is right to split your honors (play queen) IF you think Declarer is going to play the 10. It is right to play LOW if you think Declarer is going to play the King! If Dummy has AK104, play low as smoothly as possible. Splitting your honors does no good whatsoever and completely gives the show away.

When you can kill Dummy’s long suit, it is usually right to play second-hand high. Example: dummy has xxx xx AJ10xx xxx. With Qx; Qxx; Kx or Kxx, in diamonds, play 2nd hand HIGH when Declarer leads the suit (especially against no trump). Your objective is to block the suit so that Declarer cannot run it. If you have Kx and partner has Qxx, if you play low the first round, Declarer will probably take 4 tricks in that suit (unless partner ducks from Qxx—a tough play). If you play HIGH first round, Declarer will take only one trick (because Dummy has no other entries).

If second-hand plays HIGH with an honor, it should promise three adjacent honors (not two). In other words, if Dummy has 543 and you hold QJ5 and Dummy leads a low card, play the 5. If you hold QJ10x, play the Queen. (Most experts play **top** of a sequence [queen in this case] in this specific situation.)

It is right to play second-hand high when you can see the setting trick. Take it!!

When partner has led from strength against no trump, it is often essential for you to return partner’s suit ASAP (before partner’s outside entry is removed). Playing second-hand high allows you to get in quickly and return partner’s suit. For example, partner leads Queen of spades against 3NT and dummy has 72 and you hold 643 in spades. Declarer takes Ace and goes to dummy and plays Jack of clubs (with Dummy holding J10987 of clubs). You hold K3 of clubs. Play the King! (If Declarer has the Ace of clubs, your King is dead anyway. But if Declarer has Qxx(x) and partner has Ax, it is imperative for you to take the first club & continue spades before partner’s entry is exhausted. If partner takes the first club and leads spades, Declarer ducks once (from an original holding of AKx) and you no longer have a spade to get to partner when you take the second club.

Play second hand high when Declarer is trying to get to his/her hand in order to discard a loser from Dummy on a winner in his/her hand. Example: Dummy has K xxxx xx KJ10xxx and you hold xxxx Ax xxxx Axx. Declarer opens a heart, partner overcalls a spade; Dummy bid 2H and Declarer bids 4H. Partner leads a 4th-best spade. Declarer takes King in dummy and leads a heart. You must rise immediately with the Ace of hearts and play a diamond—before Declarer has a chance to discard a losing diamond on the Ace of spades—which is known to be in Declarer’s hand.

Play second-hand high when Declarer is trying to “steal” a trick. This can occur at no trumps when your partner’s lead indicates that you have knocked out Declarer’s only stopper in partner’s long suit (Remember the Rule of 11). If Declarer goes to dummy and leads the Jack or Queen in another suit from dummy, do NOT duck with the Ace. Take the trick and lead to your partner’s long suit!

Play second-hand high to try to fool Declarer with certain “hopeless” holdings. If Dummy has J8x or 108x and you hold Q9 and dummy leads low, play the queen NOT the 9. (If you play the 9, Declarer will finesse you for queen and drop your 9 next time. If you play the queen, Declarer may finesse your partner for the 9 next trick!) If Dummy has 108x and you have J9 and Declarer leads low from Dummy, play the jack, NOT the 9. If Dummy has 108x and you hold AJ9 and Declarer leads low from Dummy, play the Jack, NOT the 9.