

PLAY LOW IN SECOND SEAT (AS DECLARER)--OR NOT?

By Maritha

Although “second hand low” is a good, general rule for Declarer (as well as defenders), there are exceptions.

Play HIGH to Preserve an Entry. When one hand has few entries, you may have to preserve an entry to that hand by playing Second Hand High to win a trick in the opposite hand. This often occurs in no trump contracts when the hand with a long suit has relatively few outside entries.

Play HIGH to Cut Communications Between the Defenders. When you know there is a long suit on one side in no trump, you want to force that defender to take a trick early in the long suit so that you can hold up your stopper(s) until the other opponent is exhausted of that suit. If you do not play second hand high, you may be forced to win in the 4th hand at a time when BOTH opponents still have cards in the long suit. A classic example is when dummy has Qx and you have Kxx in the suit that RHO has shown 5 cards. When the suit is led from your left, you must play the QUEEN from dummy. RHO has a choice of losing options. If s/he ducks, you end up with TWO stoppers in the suit. If s/he kills the Queen with the Ace, you can duck the continuation of the suit, taking the third round. At that point, LHO is now a “safe” hand (into which you can finesse). RHO remains dangerous.

Playing second hand HIGH is essential when you suspect that LHO has led a singleton. You cannot afford to duck the trick and risk getting the second round of the suit ruffed.