Always cover an Honour with an Honour?

The above adage comes to us from whist and by and large it is a good rule, but as with all such adages, it should be occasionally ignored. (Is it Victor Mollo who said “Parrot cries are for parrots”?)

Firstly, why the rule at all? Well imagine you are East with the following, and ♠Q is led from Dummy. What do you do? - and why?

Well you should cover the ♠Q with your ♠K, the reason being that you hope to promote any cards your partner might have. So the situation might be:

In the first situation, if you cover the ♠Q, then Declarer’s ♠Q and ♠A, (and your ♠K) are gobbled in the same trick, leaving East with ♠JT2 as three tricks. *(Declarer therefore should have played towards the ♠Q, hoping East held the ♠K!)* If you don’t cover the ♠Q, then Declarer makes both the ♠Q and ♠A separately. Similarly in the second case, covering the ♠Q, makes the ♠AKQ all go in the first trick, Declarer’s ♠J will take the second trick, but partner’s ♠T controls the third trick, whereas if you don’t cover, the ♠Q will win, then Declarer will successfully finesse the ♠J, your ♠K will fall under the ♠A, and then declarer enjoys the 4th ♠.

So on the whole, the adage is good and should be followed. But suppose now the situation is:

Now there is no point in covering when ♠Q is led from Dummy, because you can see that partner has nothing to promote. You might think it therefore makes no difference what you do, but you are going to look pretty silly if you cover the ♠Q and find either of the following:

Even if Declarer has ♠Ax, you can still preserve your ♠K by not covering the ♠Q, or the ♠J when that is led. Then if also Declarer has only a single side entry to Dummy, holding back the ♠K renders Dummy’s long spades useless.

A more subtle variation is

Here the danger is that if you cover the ♠Q when it is led, then Declarer will win with the ♠A and have a finesse against partners ♠T.

The solution is to wait till the ♠J is led and to cover this. The Declarer is limited to two tricks. The general rule of thumb is: **If there is a sequence in Dummy, wait until the last one is played and then cover it.**

Finally if you have

and ♠J is led from Dummy, if you cover with your ♠Q, then Declarer wins and leads towards ♠T, and defenders only get one trick. But if you let ♠J go, partner will win with her ♠K. Now if the ♠T is led from Dummy you cover and defenders get two tricks. So again: **Cover the last of the touching honours.**