

Some Thoughts on Defensive Adages

Keep Your Head in the Game

Defense

- Second hand low
- Third hand high
- Cover an honor with an honor.
- When we learn bridge, we hear those axioms over and over.
- We learn to follow them, rigorously.
- They are good advice. We should follow them the vast majority of times.
- However, there are exceptions. Let's look at some.

Second Hand Low? Example 1

Dummy

♠ Q 5

You

♠ K 9 4 2

Declarer

♠ 6

- Declarer leads a spade toward dummy.
- If you don't take you king you might not get it.
- If declarer has ♠ A 6 3,
- the queen will win, declarer will play his ace and ruff his last spade.

Second Hand Low? Example 2

Dummy
♠ Q 5

You Partner
♠ K 9 4 2 ♠ A 10 8 7

Declarer
♠ J 6 3

- What if the situation is like this?
- Now if you take your king, you give declarer a trick in the suit he cannot get if you play low.
- How do you know what to do?

Second Hand Low? Example 3

Dummy
♠ A 10 6 4

You Partner
 ♠ K 9 4 2

Declarer
♠ Q 9

- The same principle from the other side.
- Declarer leads low from dummy.
- Declarer almost surely has the queen.
- So it is probably best to play second hand high.

Second Hand Low? Example 4

Dummy
♠ Q 8 6

You Partner
 ♠ A 9 4 2

Declarer

- Suppose this is dummy's holding.
- Now you must play second hand low.
- In case your partner has the ace and declarer has ♠ J 7 5
- Do your best to hold your king over the queen.

Second Hand Low? Example 5

Dummy

♠ A J 10

You

Partner

♠ K Q 2

Declarer

♠ 5

- If you play low, declarer will surely play the jack.
- So, here you should probably play second hand high and split your honors.

Second Hand Low? Example 6

	Dummy	
	♠ A J 9	
You		Partner
♠ K Q 2		♠ 10 8 7 6
	Declarer	
	♠ 5 4 3	

- If this is the situation, you should probably play low.
- The correct way to play this combination is to finesse the 9.
- If you split your honors, you make it easy for the declarer.
- Play low in tempo.

Second Hand Low? Example 7

Dummy
♠ K 9 7 4 3

You Partner
♠ A J 8 6 2 ♠ Q10

Declarer
♠ 5

- If you count, you know there are only 3 missing clubs.
- Declarer might have a singleton and if you don't take your ace, you won't get it.

Second Hand Low? Example 8

	Dummy	
	♠ K 9 7 4 3	
You		Partner
♠ A J 8 6 2		♠ 10
	Declarer	
	♠ Q 5	

- If you count, you know there are only 3 missing clubs.
- However, declarer might be fooling you with this holding.
- In this case if you take your ace, declarer gets two tricks.
- Second hand low is the rule. Disobey it at your peril.

An Entire Hand Example

Dummy

♠ A K J

♥ K 7 5

♦ Q 6 3

♣ A J 10 8

You

♠ 9 4 2

♥ A J 3

♦ 10 9 8 7

♣ 7 4 3

Partner

♠ 10 7 6 3

♥ 9 8 6 2

♦ 5 4 2

♣ 9 8

Declarer

♠ Q 9 5

♥ Q 10 4

♦ A K J

♣ K Q 5 2

- Opponents arrive at 6nt.
- You lead the ♦10.
- Had you led your ♥A, declarer would have 12 tricks.
- Declarer leads a ♥4, toward dummy. Do you play low or high?
- If you play low, you set the contract.
- If you play high, declarer makes the contract.

Another Defensive Rule

- When you were in your crib, happily sucking on your passifier, you probably learned “Third-hand high.”
- Many of us learned it wrong. We should have been taught third hand as high as necessary, most of the time.

Third-Hand High? Example 9

	Dummy	
	♠ Q 7 4	
West		East
♠ 3		♠ K J 6
	Declarer	
	♠	

- You might be surprised how many beginners, having learned third-hand high, will play the king when the declarer calls for the 4.
- The correct play, of course, is the jack.
- Third-hand as high as necessary.

Third-Hand High? Example 10

	Dummy	
	♠ Q 7 4	
West		East
♠ 3		♠ K 10 6
	Declarer	
	♠	

- Even with this holding, you should play the 10, rather than the king, when declarer calls a low card.
- Save your king to take the queen if possible.
- Of course, if you had ♠ K 6 2, you'd play the king.

Third-Hand High? Example 11

Dummy
♠ 8 7 4

West East
♠ Q 9 3 2 ♠ K 10 6

Declarer
♠ A J 5

- The reason we play third-hand high is to set up something in partner's hand.
- You play high to force declarer's ace. Later, when you get in, you lead the ten to deprive declarer of his jack.

Third-Hand High? Example 11

Dummy
♠ Q J 10 9

West East
♠ 2 ♠ K 8 6

Declarer
♠ A 5

- If there is no chance playing high can set up something in your hand or partner's hand, there is no reason to play high.
- If you assume partner is not underleading the ace, there is no reason to play your king.
- Declarer might have something like this:

Third-Hand High? Example 112

	Dummy	
	♠ K J 10 7	
West		East
♠ 2		♠ Q 6 3
	Declarer	
	♠ A 8 5	

- Partner leads the deuce. Declarer calls for the Jack.
- Playing your queen would only help declarer.
- Play low smoothly and declarer might think partner has the queen and finesse.

Cover an Honor With an Honor

- Good advice in many cases, but not in all cases.
- Just like playing third-hand high, you cover when there is a chance of setting up a winner in your hand or in partner's hand.
- When there is no chance to do this, don't cover.

Cover an Honor with an Honor?

Example 14

	Dummy	
	♠ Q 8 3	
West		East
♠ 10 7 2		♠ K 5 4
	Declarer	
	♠ A J 9 6	

- Declarer leads the queen from dummy. You will cover with your king.
- You don't know it will help, but it might help.
- If this is the situation, covering gives declarer two tricks.
- Not covering gives her 3 tricks.

Cover an Honor with an Honor?

Example 15

Dummy
♠ A J 10 9 6

West East

♠ K 5 4

Declarer
♠ Q

- Declarer leads the queen from the closed hand.
- Should you cover?
- No. There is no chance of setting up a trick in your hand or partner's hand.

Cover an Honor with an Honor?

Example 16

Dummy
♠ A J 10 9 6

West East
♠ K 4

Declarer
♠ Q

- Here's another case.
- Declarer has opened 1 and the opponent have arrived at a six spade contract.
- Declarer leads the queen, should you cover?
- No way!!!
- Partner has 1 or zero spades.

Cover an Honor with an Honor?

Example 17

Dummy
♠ A 9 6 4

West East
♠ Q 6 3

Declarer
♠ J

- Declarer has opened 1♠.
- They have arrived at 4♠.
- Declarer wins the opening lead and leads the ♠J. Should you cover?
- Partner has 1 spade. It might be the king.

Cover an Honor with an Honor?

Example 18

	Dummy	
	♠ J 10 8 5	
West		East
♠ A 9 7		♠ Q 6 2
	Declarer	
	♠ K 4 3	

- Even when it is right to cover, you need to think about when to cover.
- Declarer leads the jack from dummy.
- You should cover, but not the jack.
- Cover the 10.
- If you plan to cover, cover the last card in a sequence.

Cover an Honor with an Honor?

Example 19

	Dummy	
	♠ Q J 4	
West		East
♠ 10 6 5		♠ K 7 3
	Declarer	
	♠ A 9 8 2	

- One more example of covering the last card in a sequence.
- Declarer plays the queen.
- If you cover, declarer wins the ace then traps your partner's 10. Gets 4 tricks.
- If you wait and cover the jack, declarer gets only three tricks.

Final Thoughts

- The defensive axioms:
 - Second-hand low
 - Third-hand high
 - Cover an honor with an honor
- Are good advice most of the time.
- And you should follow them most of the time.
- However, they are not absolute.
- Keep your head in the game and follow them when it is right to do so, and disobey then when that is the right thing to do.