

THIRD IN HAND – DECLARER’S FRIEND?

1. We pay a lot of attention to the opening lead but, arguably, it is the 3rd to play (I’ll call him East) who has the most influence on the outcome. East can see two hands and will know, to within a point or two, the point counts in all four hands; and from West’s lead he’ll have a good idea of what and how many cards declarer has in the “lead” suit.

2. When dummy goes down, East MUST plan the defence before playing a card. His immediate priority is to decide the best line to take:

- Is a switch necessary?
- What card should he play to avoid giving declarer a cheap trick?
- What can he do to avoid creating tricks and entries in dummy?
- If he can win the trick, should he do it now or later?

3. The most common failings in 3rd position are *playing too high*, and *not switching* at the right time or with the right card. Before that, let’s recap.

RECAP.

4. **‘third hand plays high’**. If partner leads a low card, he hopes to find you with an honour to promote his own honours. Without an honour himself, he’d lead a spot card -2nd highest from four, or top-of-nothing (better than MUD).

In example (a) West leads the ♠6. Clearly, East must play the ♠Q.

(a) ♠ 9 7 2
 ♠ K J 6 5 3 ♠ Q 8
 ♠ A 10 4

5. The next one is harder. Partner leads the ♠2 against 3NT, clearly a fourth-highest lead. Declarer plays the ♠7 from dummy. Which spade should you play?

♠ Q 7 ♥ K 5 4 ♦ A 8 7 5 ♣ K J 3 2 ♠ 2 ♠ K 10 9 4 3 ♥ J 6 2 ♦ 9 6 3 ♣ 8 4 W N S E		<i>West North East South</i> 1NT Pass 3NT Declarer has only two spades. If they are both small, it won’t matter what you do. If he has ♠ Ax you must play the 9; if he holds ♠ Jx you must play the ♠K. Is it a guess? No. With Ax, declarer would play the queen from dummy.
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Now for the many exceptions.

Finesse your partner

6. Finessing is usually right when dummy has an honour but doesn't play it, and you have *higher and lower* honours than dummy. The object is to capture dummy's honour at a later trick.

(b) ♠ J63
 ♠ Q872 ♠ K1054
 ♠ A9

(c) ♠ K63
 ♠ J972 ♠ A104
 ♠ Q85

6.1 With (b) West leads the ♠2 against 3NT and dummy plays the ♠3. If East rises with the ♠K the ♠J becomes a second spade stopper; but playing the ♠10 holds declarer to one trick. This would be equally correct against a suit contract – *unless your partner underleads Aces! (ok against NT but, please, not for an unbid suit).*

6.2 With (c), if dummy plays low on West's ♠2 lead East must play the ♠10 to hold declarer to one trick, unless he has urgent need of seizing the lead.

7. Sometimes you have no choice (e.g., A-Q behind the king) but in many cases it is not clear-cut. Be prepared to use eights and nines as "honours" in order to restrict declarer's tricks. Try not to play an Ace on thin air – Aces are for killing (opponents') Kings!

8. West leads the 3 of spades.

A Q 4 J 7 5 3 N W E S 8 7 6 K 10 2	East's king is always making but there's a good chance of an extra. If you trust partner's low card, he must have the only honour you can't see – the Jack. Play the 10 – it should win.
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9. West leads

A 10 4 K 9 5 N W E S Q 7 6 J 8 2	West is unlikely to hold both of the KQ. Your Jack would lose to South, allowing a finesse through the A10 for 3 tricks. Play the eight. This holds declarer to two tricks.
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10. West leads 2S

Q 7 3 J 9 6 2 N W E S K 8 5 A 10 4	Aces are for killing other honours. Finesse the 10, unless you need an immediate switch before declarer gets control. Playing the Ace gives declarer two tricks. Note that if declarer has the Jack, he was always going to make one trick in the suit anyway.
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11. West leads

J 4 3 1087 2 W N S E A Q 5	K 9 6 Play the nine. Partner has one or both of the Q & 10, so your South has AQ or A10. Keep your King to kill the Jack, promoting something for West
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12. West leads the ♥9 against 4 Spades. How should you defend in the East seat?

♠ Q J 8 2 ♥ 10 6 5 ♦ K J 9 ♣ A K J	♠ 7 6 ♥ A 8 4 3 2 ♦ 8 7 6 ♣ 8 6 4	<table><tr><th>South</th><th>West</th><th>North</th><th>East</th></tr><tr><td>1NT</td><td>-</td><td>2♥</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>2♠</td><td>-</td><td>3NT</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>4♠</td><td>All Pass</td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> West has led a doubleton. He wouldn't lead 9 from an honour, so South has KQJ. If partner has a singleton, declarer has 5spades and 4 hearts – he'd not offer 3NT with that shape. You must keep your ♥ Ace, encouraging with the ♥8, and hoping partner quickly regains the lead with the ace or king of trumps. Now he can lead his 2nd ♥ for a ruff.	South	West	North	East	1NT	-	2♥	-	2♠	-	3NT	-	4♠	All Pass		
South	West	North	East															
1NT	-	2♥	-															
2♠	-	3NT	-															
4♠	All Pass																	

Don't squander high cards

13 Is it lack of thought, fear of criticism, or blind obedience to the 3rd *play high* mantra that causes us to waste a high card, creating an extra trick for declarer? Maybe we could improve if we agreed lead styles with partner and trusted partner to stick to the agreement?

14 In this example South is in 6♠ and West leads the ♥8.

♠ AQJ10 64 ♥ 2 ♦ AJ 2 ♣ K 10 9 ♠ 85 ♥ 9 8 4 ♦ 9865 ♣ 6543 W N S E ♠ K9732 ♥ AQJ10 ♦ K3 ♣ J7	♠ --- ♥ K7653 ♦ Q1074 ♣ AQ82 East makes the mistake of playing the ♥K; declarer discards all of dummy's clubs on hearts and makes 13 tricks. Surely the ♥8 is from a weak holding? West won't have underled the Ace; he'd lead low from Qxx; and an honour from QJ10 or Q109. So South has Ace AND Queen. Playing the King can't help; and dummy has only 1 heart so a second lead through you King is impossible. <i>MORAL- when partner leads a high spot card, he has no honours and wants you to protect your holding.</i>
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15. In the next deal West leads the three of spades. Should East contribute the queen?

♠ J 10 9 ♥ Q 6 ♦ A K 5 4 3 ♣ J 6 3 ♠ Q 4 2 ♥ A 9 ♦ J 10 8 7 ♣ K 10 5 4 ♠ 3 N W E S	South West North East 1 ♠ Pass 2 ♦ Pass 2 ♠ Pass 3 ♠ Pass 4 ♠ All Pass If you play the ♠Q South can make his contract in two ways: (i) he can duck a ♥ then ruff in dummy; (ii) he can ruff dummy's 5th ♦ good, using dummy's spades as entries. If you keep your ♠Q you foil both of these chances.
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Signal if free to do so.

16. Often, you can't beat partner's (or dummy's) card. Tell partner whether you want him to continue or switch next time he's in -^{HIGH} to encourage / ^{LOW} for a switch.

17. You might want to encourage for 3 reasons – (i) to get a ruff; (ii) to avoid a dangerous switch; or (iii) you have some honours. (iii) is particularly important when partner leads a King - if declarer has AJx, partner needs to switch so play discouraging (declarer's duck is known as the Bath coup, inviting a continuation which creates an extra trick); if you have the Jack, he can continue safely - but you need to tell him!

(d) ♠ 9 6 2
♠ KQ 107 ♠ J 8 4
♥ A 53
Play the 8 in (d)

(e) ♠ 9 6 2
♠ KQ 107 ♠ 8 4 3
♥ A J 5
and the 3 in (e).

Unblocking

18. This is usually straightforward but here are some teasers. Consider East's actions here. West has made the opening lead against a 3NT contract.

(f) ♠ K62
♠ Q led ♠ 1073

(g) ♠ 753
♠ K led ♠ J82

18.1 In (f), East knows that West has led from ♠AQJ or ♠QJ9. Suppose dummy rises with the ♠K. East knows it is safe for West to continue the suit, but if West had QJ9 he will worry that a further spade lead will be into declarer's ♠A10. The ♠7 from East would be ambiguous - it might be from an ♠87 doubleton. *Don't be subtle – unload the 10 immediately.*

18.2 In (g), West must have ♠KQ10. Play the ♠J - otherwise, if declarer ducks West will not continue the suit for fear of leading into the ♠AJ (the Bath coup).

Overtaking

It is usually right to overtake a king with A-x; often right to overtake a queen with K-x; and sometimes right to overtake a jack with Q-x.

19. West leads

75 3	
K Q 109 4	A 2
	
J 86	

East should overtake with the ace. In No Trumps, this is the only chance to run the suit. Against a suit contract, East could ruff the third round if West did not have at least K-Q-10.

20. West leads

K 4 3	
J 10 975	Q 6
	
A 82	

At NT, East should overtake with the queen. Otherwise, he has no exit to drive out the King if declarer takes the ace and ducks the next round. *At a suit contract, however, East should usually play low since the defensive goal is just to establish one trick in the suit*

21. West leads

Do not unblock if dummy has a card that is likely to be promoted into a trick for declarer.

A 9 3	
J 10 87	Q 6
	
K 542	

Here East should play low regardless of the contract. Dummy's nine would allow declarer to gain a trick by finessing if East wasted his queen.

RETURN or SWITCH?

22. The problem is only too familiar. West leads his long suit against 3NT and strikes gold as East wins trick 1. The defenders are well on course to beat the contract ... until East switches to his own longest suit!

23. Defence is a partnership, both working towards the same goal rather than each with his own little horizon. There are many occasions when it is necessary to switch suit. **Before deciding what to do, East must analyze West's opening lead and take account of three things West didn't know:**

- What is in dummy;
- East's holding in that and other suits;
- Clues about declarer's hand, revealed by his choice of card from dummy.

A high spot card from West

24. This virtually demands a switch. Partner has no interest in the suit and is making a defensive lead. In the following examples North has raised South's 1NT opening bid to 3NT. West leads the ♥8 and declarer calls for dummy's ♥10 from

{3NT; lead = ♥ 8} Dummy has ♠ KJ7 ♥ AJ10 ♦ A643 ♣ 853

- (h) ♠ 864 ♥ K75 ♦ KQJ7 ♣ 972
 (i) ♠ 864 ♥ K75 ♦ J972 ♣ 972
 (j) ♠ 864 ♥ KQ95 ♦ J97 ♣ Q72

24.1 With (h), win the ♥K and switch to the ♦K. There is no future in hearts.

24.2 With (i), return the ♣7 or 9 (MUD or Top of Nothing). Lead through strength up to dummy's weakness - perhaps partner has the ♣AQ104 over declarer's ♣KJ6. Don't lead the 9 – you might promote the 8! (Note – partner has 9-11 points if they have bid honestly).

24.3 With (j), you win with the Queen and want a heart continuation by West. Switch to the ♣2 (showing a ♣ honour), up to dummy's weakness. If declarer has good clubs you will have done nothing for him that he couldn't do himself. Partner knows you have the ♥K and will continue.

An unusual lead from West

25. If partner makes a strange opening lead, ask yourself why! This happened recently at my table.

♠ AQJx ♥ xx ♦ 98xx ♣ QJx		<table><tr><th>South</th><th>West</th><th>North</th><th>East</th></tr><tr><td>1 ♥</td><td>P</td><td>1 ♠</td><td>P</td></tr><tr><td>1NT</td><td>P</td><td>2NT</td><td>P</td></tr><tr><td>3NT</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>				South	West	North	East	1 ♥	P	1 ♠	P	1NT	P	2NT	P	3NT			
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1NT	P	2NT	P																		
3NT																					
♠ K987 ♥ AJ108x ♦ QJ ♣ 75	♠ xx ♥ x ♦ Axxxx ♣ 10xxxx	I was on lead and had both majors, which had been bid by NS. I counted East for at most 5 points and, since I need him to lead to me, I wanted to protect his entry – if there was one. With a choice between the minors, I opted for the Q♦.																			
♠ 10xx ♥ KQ97x ♦ K10 ♣ AKx		Alas, partner played too quickly. He rose with the Ace and returned the suit, promoting a trick for declarer. Partner ignored the bidding.																			

26. On the hand above, it is clear that NS don't have a fit in the majors. So I (West) must have at least five hearts and four spades. Even if I had four diamonds I couldn't have the King, and East has now blown his only entry!

Where Is the Ace?

27. On the *opening lead against a suit contract* it is not advisable to underlead an ace in a side suit. This fails more often than it gains, so experienced players do not do it. Consequently, if third hand does not see the ace in this situation, he should assume *declarer* has it.

If declarer is marked for the ace, consider the merits of *not* playing third hand high.

28. 4 ♥ by South. West leads the five of spades.

K106 J9753 W N E S Q8 A42	Using the rule of 11, South has one card above the 5. This must be the ace (unless West is being a clown) so finesse the 8. Playing the ♠Q would set up the K10 for 3 tricks in total. If the contract were no trump, East should play the queen since West would often hold the ace.
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29. 4 ♥ by South. West leads the two of clubs.

QJ9 10652 W N E S K84 A73	East should play the 4. South is marked with the ace, so playing the king would set up three tricks immediately. Ducking gives up only two tricks provided the defenders do not lead this suit again. Note that declarer could win three tricks legitimately by inserting the <i>nine</i> at trick one, a dubious play.
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SURROUND PLAY

30. Let's finish with some points on which card to lead when you're behind dummy.

31. Standard leads are well known – 4th from a broken suit headed by an honour, MUD and so on. What is not so well known is how best to do avoid creating tricks in dummy. Novices will often look at the highest card in dummy and lead something slightly bigger, to avoid declarer ducking it round to dummy. Sometimes, that's right, sometimes it isn't. How do you know?

32. A tactic called 'Surround Play' may arise whenever the *intermediate* cards in a suit are of significant value. Compare these two situations with East to lead:

(a)	10 7 2	(b)	10 7 2
K 8 3	A J 6 4	K 5 3	A J 9 4
Q 9 5		Q 8 6	

32.1 In (a), East can't stop declarer making one trick in the suit. A low card is run to dummy's 10 which forces West to win with the King. Subsequently dummy plays towards the Q-9 to establish a winner. Obviously, neither the ace nor the jack would enable the defence to take more than their two tricks.

32.2 In (b), the J9 'surround' the 10, providing a totally different picture. The Jack (no other card will do) goes to Q,K and the 10 is trapped by East's A-9 on the way back.

33. Let's see this play in a full deal. West leads the ♥ K against South's contract of 4♠.

♠ A74 ♥ J ♦ KQJ1096 ♣ 1072		East must make two key plays. First, he overtakes with the ♥ A; then he switches - to the ♣ J. No other card will do if the contract is to be defeated. This piece of fine tuning arises because the J9 of clubs 'surround' dummy's ten.	
♠ 853 ♥ KQ1042 ♦ 72 ♣ K53	♠ 62 ♥ A963 ♦ 853 ♣ AJ94	Suppose declarer covers the ♣ J with the queen. West wins and returns the suit through dummy's 10 enabling East to make both the Ace & 9.	
♠ KQJ109 ♥ 875 ♦ A4 ♣ Q86		Note that the same result could not be achieved if West played clubs first, or if East played the 4, or if East cashed the ace.	

34. Position (c) is perhaps the easiest of all to recognise:

(c)	J87	(d)	J87
652	AQ103	1052	AQ93
K94		K64	

East wants three winners from this suit so he plays the queen as he has a surround position over dummy's jack. Suppose his holding is slightly inferior, e.g. AQ93. With the jack in dummy, the queen will still be correct if the layout is as in (d), hoping to pin the 10 or find it with West.

35. One last example: West leads the ♠ J against South's contract of 4♥ (1♥– 3♥– 4♥).

♠ KQ ♥ Q984 ♦ 974 ♣ QJ106		East wins the ♠ A. What now? There is only one card in East's hand that will seal declarer's fate.	
♠ J10974 ♥ 65 ♦ Q32 ♣ 843	♠ A652 ♥ A3 ♦ K1086 ♣ 972	Noting the surround layout (the ♦ K108 over dummy's 9), East switches to the ♦ 10. If declarer wins the ace, the defence have their two tricks. If declarer plays the Jack, West wins and continues the suit through dummy's 97 up to East's K8.	
♠ 83 ♥ KJ1072 ♦ AJ5 ♣ AK5		One down is inevitable, but this would not have happened had East merely switched to the ♦ 6, which declarer could run to dummy's 9.	

36. Note a major key element of Surround Play: *the second-highest card is led* and that is the one that sets the scene. The top and third remain behind dummy, waiting to pounce as soon as the suit is returned.