

### 3rd Hand Play

The bridge maxim "3rd hand high" is the companion of "2nd hand low." Both maxims apply to defenders. Second hand is the player who is 2nd to play to a trick, and third hand is the 3rd one to play to a trick. Play "second hand low" when declarer plays a low card from his hand or from dummy. Play "3rd hand high" when partner leads a low card and you can beat the card played by dummy or declarer.

No maxim is absolute, though ;) There are exceptions to 3rd hand high.

- Dummy has an honor you can beat! If dummy has the Jack, Queen or King and you have a higher honor, don't play your highest honor until dummy plays its higher honor. Save your big one for their big one!
- Cheaper of Equals: Play the lower of touching (equal) cards. Remember we lead from the top and receive from the bottom!! If you play the lowest of equals, partner will know you have everything in between. Partners need to work together!

When you play third to a trick, IF YOU HOLD		THEN PLAY
	KQ2 QJ32 JT9	the Q the J the <u>9</u>
<u>A8742</u>	Dummy Q65 KJ93 ( <b>you</b> )	If dummy plays small, you play small, (beating the card dummy plays). But if dummy plays the Q, cover it with the K.
<u>JT84</u>	Dummy K76 A95 ( <b>you</b> )	If dummy plays small, you play the 9, but if dummy plays the K, you win the A. (Then return the 9, through declarer's hand into partner's long suit.)

*When declarer owns both the K and Q, one in dummy and one in hand, they're entitled to JUST ONE of those. When you hold the A behind **this K**, if you play the A when they play low, you just gave declarer an undeserved trick. They will now win BOTH the K and the Q. Yikes!*

<u>K32</u>	Dummy 7 <u>65</u> QJT3 ( <b>you</b> )	If dummy plays small, you play the 10, which is <u>only as high as necessary</u> . It is high enough to force out declarer's honor. If they duck, next play Q, then J.
<u>Q765</u>	Dummy T4 <u>3</u> J98 ( <b>you</b> )	If dummy plays small, you play the 8, as high as necessary to get the job done! Keep your J9 behind that 10!

**Board 1**

North Deals  
Both Vul

	♠ J 10 7					
	♥ A 3					
	♦ A K Q 9					
	♣ Q 8 7 6					
♠ A K 9 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ Q 6	
N						
W E						
S						
♥ 8 7 6 5 4 2		♥ 10 9				
♦ 10 3		♦ J 8 7 6 5				
♣ 3		♣ A 5 4 2				
	♠ 8 5 4 3					
	♥ K Q J					
	♦ 4 2					
	♣ K J 10 9					
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>			
	1 N	Pass	2 ♣			
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	3 N			
All pass						

**Opening Lead:** 6 ♦ - The clubs may be headed by the Ace, but the diamonds are longer.

**Planning the Play:** The defenders are trying to work out where the missing honors are; so declarer, don't make it easy on them! With two or three equals, it is almost always right to take the trick with the second highest equal. One major exception: At notrump, holding the AK(x), take the trick with the king. After winning the K♦, declarer needs to set up clubs to have a chance at making 9 tricks. Low to the J♣ is best; if West wins the Ace, they will not know who has the Queen!

**Defensive Commentary:** When West plays the 10♦ at trick one, East knows North has the AKQ9 of diamonds. Why? (1) The play of the 10 denies the 9. Holding 109, the 9, the lower equal, is the proper play. (2) When the opening leader (East) has the card directly above the card partner has played (J♦), this is a telltale sign that third hand has played his highest card. Two tips to tuck away. Thinking through what we know is how we figure out how to set them!

East plays second hand low on the first ♣, not knowing if partner has the Q♣. When North leads another ♣ from the dummy, West, don't fall into the trap by making an encouraging ♠ discard. You may have 4 spade tricks! Discard a low ♥ instead. East should win the second ♣. Now, they can make the killing shift if they count declarer's points!

Declarer is known to have: AKQ♦ (from opening lead), Q♣ (partner showed out), and A♥ (partner discouraged). That's 15 HCP. So, where are the AK♠? Partner has them! (Otherwise, declarer has more than 17 HCP.) East should lead the Q♠, and will watch West play the 2 ♠ on the trick. Will East be discouraged by the 2 ♠? They shouldn't be, the Queen will win the trick, and the counting they did earlier is still valid. Continue spades for the one-trick set.

**Takeaway:** Learning to count is the path to learning to take more tricks!

**Board 5**

North Deals  
None Vul

♠ A K 9 8 7 4	♠ 6 2	♠ J 10 3									
♥ K 3 2	♥ A Q	♥ 8 7 6 5 4									
♦ A 9 3	♦ K 7 2	♦ 10 8									
♣ 4	♣ A 10 7 6 3 2	♣ K Q J									
<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>				N		W		E		S	
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ Q 5										
	♥ J 10 9										
	♦ Q J 6 5 4										
	♣ 9 8 5										

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦
1 ♠	2 ♣	2 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

**Auction Commentary:** West makes a mildly aggressive jump to game. If they had made a game try of 3 ♦ or 3 ♥, they would likely have come to rest in 3 ♠.

**Opening Lead:** 2 ♦ - low from 3 or 4 cards. South must play the J ♦, the lowest of touching honors, (NOT the Q ♦!). If declarer wins the A ♦, North knows that South has the Q ♦. If South mistakenly plays the Q ♦, North will think that West has the J ♦.

**Planning the Play:** Declarer needs to set up dummy's ♣s in order to pitch losers from their hand. We normally draw trump BEFORE working on side suits. However, we will need the trumps in dummy to deal with our third ♦ after the defense wins the A ♣. West should lead the ♣ at trick 2. (Wouldn't it be great if North ducked?)

**Defensive Commentary:** North should win the A ♣ at trick 2, watching South play the 5 ♣ (giving partner a count signal). Doing the math, North knows that West started with a singleton ♣. North needs partner to be the one to lead a ♥. If North cashes the K ♦ next, though, West will be able to go to dummy and pitch ♥s on good ♣s. North knows that South holds Q ♦ -- (see opening lead commentary). So North should play a small ♦ to reach partner. South catches on, makes the obvious shift to the J ♥, and sets the contract.

**Alternate History:** At trick 1, West also knows that South has either QJ ♦ or KQJ ♦, because North would not have underled the KQ ♦ on opening lead against a suit contract. A tricky West player will DUCK the first trick, preventing South from getting in later to make the killing ♥ shift. If they don't pause to think about the hand, and they continue ♦s, West will make the contract. When North wins the A ♣ later, they will have lost communication with South. They will no longer be able to put South on lead for a ♥ shift.

**Takeaway:** Defensive carding rules are important to remember; don't let partner go wrong by not following them! Play the lowest of touching honors when trying to win in third hand. (And make sure you pay attention to every one of partner's cards!)

**Board 11**  
 South Deals  
 None Vul

	♠ 10 9		
	♥ 10 5		
	♦ 5 4 3 2		
	♣ 8 7 6 3 2		
♠ A 5	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">             N W     E S           </div>	♠ 8 7 6	
♥ 7 6 2		♥ Q J 9 8	
♦ Q J 9 7		♦ A 10 8 6	
♣ Q 9 5 4		♣ J 10	
	♠ K Q J 4 3 2		
	♥ A K 4 3		
	♦ K		
	♣ A K		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			2 ♣
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

**Auction Commentary:** The 3 ♣ rebid was, by agreement, an artificial "double negative", denying an ace, a king or two queens. If South rebids her original suit, 3 ♠, after a double negative, North can pass. However, a new suit (3 ♥), is 100% forcing. South appears to have only 3 losers, so it's correct to bid game, even though partner may have no high cards.

**Opening lead:** Q ♦ - top of a sequence. When missing one card (10) this is a full sequence.

**Planning the Play:** Counting losers in a suit contract, declarer has a ♦ loser, a ♠ loser and maybe 2 ♥ losers. The plan will be to gain control, play AK♥, and ruff 2 ♥s in dummy.

**Defensive Commentary:** East is armed with everything they need to plot a defeat of this contract. Was East listening to the auction? South bid 3 ♥, and East has very strong ♥s. South surely plans to ruff ♥ losers in dummy, but what if their aren't any trumps left to do the ruffing? East wins the A ♦ and returns a trump. Delightfully, West wins A ♠ and, trusting partner, plays another ♠. (Good Job, Partner!) South is now left without resource; they must lose 2 ♥ tricks in addition to the 2 aces.

**Takeaways:**

(1) When you have strength in declarer's side suit, playing trumps is often the way to take your tricks in that suit. We don't want declarer to be able to ruff their small ones.

(2) It could be right to duck your ace on the first round. Sometimes we want to maintain communication with partner (see board 5). In this hand, though, no such reason for ducking exists. Still, it is a play to keep tucked away for the right opportunity.