THIRD HAND PLAY AGAINST NO TRUMP CONTRACTS

THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE THIRD HAND!

RULE OF 11

When your partner's opening lead is fourth highest, the ***rule of eleven*** can be used to determine the number of higher cards in declarer's hand. This gives you important clues about the location of honor cards and in some cases this knowledge allows you to play a lower card than normal.

Rule of Eleven

When partner's lead is fourth highest:
   a.   Subtract the size of the lead card from 11
   b.   Subtract the number of higher cards you see in the dummy
   c.   Subtract the number of higher cards you see in your hand
The result is the number of higher cards in declarer's hand.

RULE OF ELEVEN • EXAMPLE 1

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	2♦	2♠
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

- ***What are your partner's remaining spades?***
  Because of the overcall, you know partner had five spades. The rule of eleven tells you that declarer only had one spade higher than the five:

  $$11 - 5 \text{ (lead)} = 6 - 3 \text{ (see in dummy)} = 3 - 2 \text{ (see in hand)} = 1 \text{ (declarer)}$$

  but declarer played the ♠K on the first trick. That means that your partner must still have ♠AQ8x.

- ***Why did you play the ♠T?***
  Third hand high but only as high as necessary.

- ***What are declarer's remaining spades?***
  Since your partner started with five, the dummy started with three, and you had three spades, declarer started with only two spades. declarer's remaining spade must be a spot, either the ♠4 or the ♠2.

RULE OF ELEVEN • EXAMPLE 2			

◆ **7**

PARTNER
DECLARER   DUMMY
YOU

◆ **6**

◆ **T** 8 3

◆ **J** 5 2

South	West	North	East
Pass	**1NT**	Pass	**2♣**
Pass	**2♥**	Pass	**3NT**
Pass	Pass	Pass	

- *What are your partner's remaining diamonds?*

  Seeing the ◆**6532**, you assume partner led fourth highest instead of top of nothing. The rule of eleven tells you that declarer only had one diamond higher than the seven

  $$11 - 7 \text{ (lead)} = 4 - 2 \text{ (see in dummy)} = 2 - 1 \text{ (see in hand)} = 1 \text{ (declarer)}$$

  Partner must have three cards from ◆**AKQ9**. Since declarer did not take the first trick with the ◆**K**, declarer probably has the ◆**A** and partner has the ◆**KQ9**. If partner started with five diamonds, partner also has the ◆**4**.

- *What are declarer's remaining diamonds?*

  Declarer has one or two remaining diamonds with one card from ◆**AKQ**.

RULE OF ELEVEN • EXAMPLE 3			

♠ **7**

PARTNER
DECLARER   DUMMY
YOU

♠ **A**

♠ **J** 8 5

♠ **K** T 9

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	**2NT**	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

- *What are your partner's remaining spades?*

  Because we do not see the ◆**6432**, partner may have led top of nothing instead of fourth highest. From the rule of eleven we have

  $$11 - 7 \text{ (lead)} = 4 - 2 \text{ (see in dummy)} = 2 - 3 \text{ (see in hand)} = -1 \text{ (error)}$$

  A negative number is only possible if your partner did lead from the top of nothing. So partner probably has two or three remaining spade spots.

  > If the rule of eleven contradicts the cards in view,
  > you can be sure that partner led from the top of nothing.

- *What are declarer's remaining spades?*

  Declarer must have the ♠**AQ** and one or two spots.

- *Why did you play the ♠K knowing that it would lose to the ♠A?*

  If you let declarer take the trick with the ♠**J**, your ♠**K** will be trapped and you will not take any spade tricks. But if you *cover the honor with an honor* and declarer has three spades, you will eventually take a trick with the ♠**T**.

UNBLOCKING

When your partner makes an opening lead in a long suit, you may have to play a high card even though it isn't needed to win the trick. This is called *unblocking the suit* to avoid stranding partner's winners in the suit. You play the unnecessary high card in order to save a low card that you can use to lead to your partner on a later trick.

> If you have a doubleton in partner's suit,
> it is almost always correct to play high low.

UNBLOCKING • EXAMPLE 1

♥K

PARTNER
DECLARER　　　　DUMMY
YOU

♥3

♥ 9 5 4

♥A 6

West	North	East	South
1NT	**Pass**	**2NT**	**Pass**
3NT	**Pass**	**Pass**	**Pass**

- *What are your partner's remaining hearts?*

  Since partner's lead should have been top of connecting honors in a three card (broken) sequence, partner must have the ♥Q and either the ♥J or ♥T and at least one other heart.

- *Why did you play the ♥A?*

  If you keep the ♥A you block the suit. When your partner leads another heart, you will win the trick with the Ace but you will no longer have a heart to lead back to your partner. Unless your partner has an entry in another suit, you will have stranded partners winners in the suit. When you *overtake* the King with the Ace, you can lead the ♥6 which will trap a high card in declarer's hand.

UNBLOCKING • EXAMPLE 2

♦T

PARTNER
DECLARER　　　　DUMMY
YOU

♦5

♦A

♦K 3

West	North	East	South
1♦	**Pass**	**1♠**	**Pass**
1NT	**Pass**	**3NT**	**Pass**
Pass	**Pass**		

- *What are your partner's remaining diamonds?*

  Since partner's lead is from a suit the opponents bid, partner should have a long suit with an honor higher than the ♦T. That honor must be the ♦Q so partner should have started with ♦QT9xx and the declarer must have the ♦J.

- ***Why did you play the ♦K?***

  If you keep the ♦K you block the suit and strand partner's winners. You want to save a low diamond to lead to your partner if you gain the lead in another suit. That will trap the ♦J in declarer's hand between partners ♦Q and ♦9.

UNBLOCKING • EXAMPLE 3	

♦ **4**

PARTNER

♦ **3**

DECLARER   DUMMY

YOU

♠ A T 7 4
♥ 9 8 6 3
♦ A
♣ A J T 4

♠ J 6
♥ Q J 5 4
♦ K **Q** 6
♣ K 9 6 2

West	North	East	South
1♦	**Pass**	**1♠**	**Pass**
1NT	**Pass**	**3NT**	

- ***What are your partner's remaining diamonds?***

  Since partner's lead is fourth highest from a suit the opponents bid, partner should have a long diamond suit with an honor. That honor must be the ♦J so partner probably started with ♦**Jxxxx**.

- ***What does the rule of eleven tell us?***

  Using the rule of eleven we find that declarer must have three diamonds higher than the four:

  > **11 - 4** *(lead)* = **7 - 1** *(see in dummy)* = **6 - 3** *(see in hand)* = **3** *(declarer)*

  If West started with four diamonds and still has three higher than the four, then your partner must have the ♦**2**.

  > *A nice learning exercise but we knew that based on the bidding and opening lead!*

- ***Why did you play the ♦Q instead of the ♦6?***

  If you play the ♦**6** on the first trick, you block the suit and your partnership only gets two diamond tricks. Sooner or later, declarer will have to attack clubs or hearts. When you win a sure trick with the ♣**K** or a likely trick with the ♥**Q**, you can play the ♦**K** and then lead the ♦**6** to your partner. This traps declarer's higher cards under partner's ♦**J** and your partner should be able to take three more diamond tricks.

OVERTAKING

There are situations in which your partner leads a winner and you must *overtake* partner's winner. The first unblocking example, repeated here, is also an obvious example of overtaking.

UNBLOCKING AND OVERTAKING • EXAMPLE 1	

♥ K

PARTNER
DECLARER   DUMMY
YOU

♥ 3

♥ 9 5 4

♥ A 6

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

But there are other not so obvious cases where you must overtake your partner's winner. For example:

OVERTAKING • EXAMPLE 2	

♠ K

PARTNER

DECLARER   DUMMY

YOU

♠ 4

♠ 9 2
♥ K 2
♦ A Q J T 9 7
♣ A Q 8

♠ A J T 8 5 3
♥ Q J 4
♦ K 3
♣ 5 3

East	South	West	North
1♦	1♠	1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

- *Why overtake partner's ♠K?*
  West bid **1NT** which implies a balanced hand with a stopper in spades. Since the stopper must be the ♠Q, West must have at least two spade spots. Partner's spade plus dummies two spades plus your six spades plus declarer's three spades accounts for twelve spades. The question is who has the remaining spade? Since partner may very well have led a singleton, you must play the ♠A to guarantee that spades will be led again. Then you can drive out the ♠Q. When declarer tries to develop the diamonds, you will get a trick with the ♦K and run your remaining spades to set the contract.

HOLDUP PLAY

A good no trump declarer will formulate a plan and, if the plan requires the loss of some tricks, declarer will try to take the losses early without losing control of any of the suits. Since declarer's plan often includes establishing extra winners in a long suit by driving out your stoppers in the suit, you may be able to ruin declarer's plan by refusing to take a trick as long as feasible. This is called a **holdup play**.

HOLDUP PLAY • EXAMPLE 1

	East	South	West	North
	Pass	Pass	**1NT**	Pass
	2NT	Pass	**3NT**	Pass
	Pass	Pass		

Partner (North):
♠
♥ 2
♦ 9
♣

West:
♠
♥ A
♦ 2
♣

Dummy (East):
♠ T 9 5
♥ 5 4 3
♦ K Q J T 8
♣ Q 2

You (South):
♠ Q 6 4
♥ Q T 7
♦ A 6 4
♣ K 9 7 6

Your partner's opening lead was the ♥**2** and the cards played so far are:

Trick 1:   N→♥**2**   E→♥**3**   S→♥**Q**   W→♥**A**

Trick 2:   W→♦**2**   N→♦**9**   E→♦**K**   S→♦**4**

- ***Why did you play the ♥Q on the first trick?***

  Partner's lead should have been fourth highest from longest and strongest suit which promises at least one honor. You played *third hand high* to help establish partner's suit.

- ***Why did you play the ♦4 on the second trick?***

  Declarer is trying to drive out the ♦A in order to run the long diamonds in the dummy. Because you have the ♣K, declarer's only sure entry to the dummy is in diamonds. If you **holdup** the ♦A and declarer only has two or three diamonds, you can limit declarer to two diamond tricks. If you play the ♦A now, declarer will get four diamond tricks!

If your partner leads an honor to indicate a sequence or fourth highest from a long suit, you usually want to return your partner's opening lead at your first opportunity. But, you should violate that guideline if you see a way to interfere with declarers plan to develop tricks in the dummy. For example:

HOLDUP PLAY • EXAMPLE 2

	♠ 6	
	♥ J	
	♦	
	♣ 2	

	West	North	East	South
	1NT	**Pass**	**2NT**	**Pass**
	3NT	**Pass**	**Pass**	**Pass**

PARTNER

West:
♠ 5
♥ 3
♦
♣ Q

DECLARER   DUMMY

East:
♠ A 2
♥ 7 4 2
♦ J 5 3
♣ K J T 9 3

YOU

♠ K Q 9 4
♥ A 6
♦ T 8 7 2
♣ A 8 5

Your partner's opening lead was the ♥J and the cards played so far are:

Trick 1: N→♥J   E→♥2   S→♥A   W→♥3   *Unblock and third hand high*

Trick 2: S→♠Q   W→♠5   N→♠6   E→♠A   *Drive out dummy's entry*

Trick 3: E→♣3   S→♣5   W→♣Q   N→♣2   *Holdup play*

- ***Why did you play the ♥A on the first trick?***
  Partner's lead is top of a connecting honors in a sequence. Partner has the ♥T and might have the ♥K. You played *third hand high* to unblock the suit.

- ***Why did you switch to the ♠Q on the second trick?***
  Declarer will try to establish the clubs in the dummy. But if you drive out the ♠A and then holdup your ♣A, you can prevent declarer from taking more than one or two club tricks.

LEADS AFTER TRICK ONE

There are several guidelines that you should follow if you gain the lead after the first trick.

> Return partner's opening lead.

If you are on lead after your partner's opening lead was either the top of a sequence or fourth highest, you usually want to lead a card in partner's suit. That suit is probably your partnership's longest suit and you should help your partner establish tricks in that suit.

EXCEPTIONS
- Your partner led top of nothing.
- You see strength in partner's suit in the dummy.

Given one of these exceptions, try to make a lead that can help establish your own long strong suit.

LEADING A NEW SUIT

If you can not or should not return your partner's opening lead suit and you do not have a suit of your own, try to make a lead that will help your partner take a trick. If you are leading a new suit, it is often wise to lead through strength toward weakness in the hope that partner has the missing high card(s) and can take a trick.

> Lead through dummy strength toward declarer weakness.

If the dummy is on your left, lead through the strength in the dummy. For example:

| LEAD THROUGH DUMMY STRENGTH	LEAD THROUGH DUMMY STRENGTH
A Q 5 3 PARTNER / DUMMY DEC / YOU / ⬑ 8 6 2	K J 5 PARTNER / DUMMY DEC / YOU / ⬑ 9 6 3
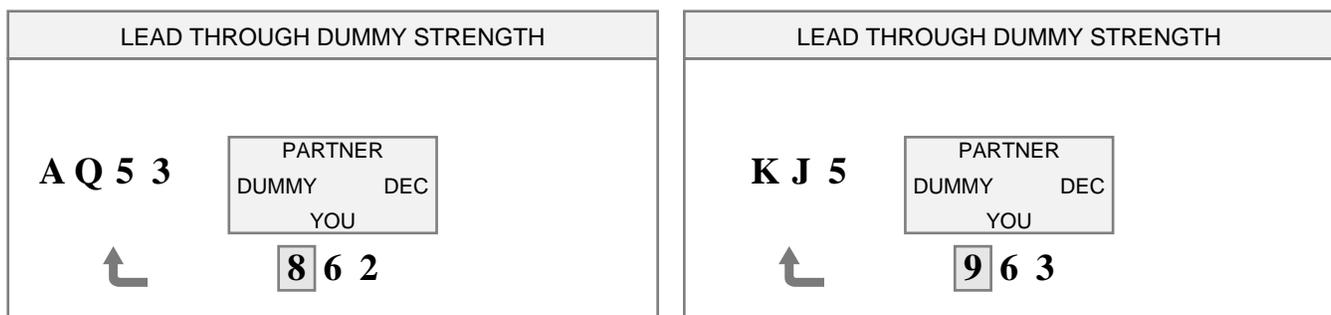
In the example on the left, you hope that you partner has the King. If so, your lead ensures that partner will take a trick with the King, either now or later. In the example on the right you hope that your partner has the Ace and the Queen. If so your lead gives your partner two sure tricks.

> *When the dummy's on the left, lead a card thru dummy's heft!*

> Lead through declarer strength toward dummy weakness.

If the dummy is on your right, lead toward the weakness in the dummy. That is, lead through the assumed strength in declarer's hand. For example:

LEAD TOWARD DUMMY WEAKNESS	LEAD TOWARD DUMMY WEAKNESS
PART DEC DUMMY **T 7** YOU **8** 6 2	PART DEC DUMMY **J 6 3** YOU **7** 5 4
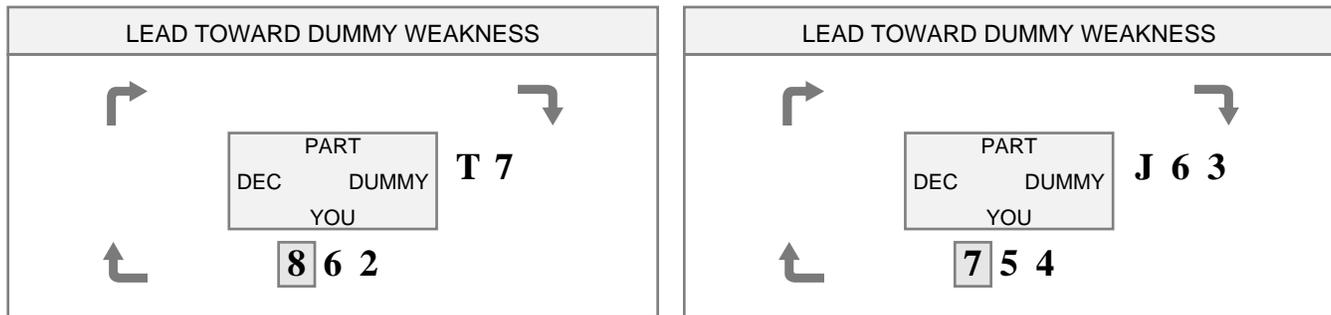
In both of these examples, there are a number of missing honors. If your partner has one of those honors, you improve the chances that your partner will be able to take a trick.

> *When the dummy's on the right, lead the weakest suit in sight!*

DEFENSIVE SIGNALS

Defenders can use the play of their spot cards (the two to the nine) to give *signals* to guide subsequent card play. There are three types of defensive signals:

- *Attitude Signals*

  Used to encourage or discourage partner from leading or continuing to lead a suit. A high card (followed by a low card) encourages and a low card (followed by a high card) discourages.[1] This is the most frequently used signal.

- *Count Signals*

  Used to show the count of the suit that was led. A high card followed by a low card shows an even number and a low card followed by a high card shows an odd number.[1]

- *Suit Preference Signals*

  When attitude and count do not apply, a high card shows preference for a higher ranking suit and a low card shows preference for a lower ranking suit.

Partnerships can adopt different methods for the use and interpretation of their signals. But most partnerships have an order of preference for their signals as shown in the table on the following page.

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[1] Some partnerships prefer *reverse* or *upside down* signals where low followed by high encourages or shows even count and high followed by low discourages or shows odd count.

LEAD BY	FOLLOWING SUIT	DISCARDING
Partner	1. **Attitude** 2. Count	1. **Attitude**
Declarer	1. **Count** 2. Suit Prefer	1. **Attitude** 2. Suit Prefer

When your partner leads, your third hand spot play can show your attitude toward the suit that was led or the suit that you discard. If an attitude signal does not apply, your third hand play can show count but attitude signals are given priority. Count signals apply only when an attitude signal clearly does not apply.

> *Be aware that declarer is also watching your defensive signals. Do not use an encouraging attitude signal if it will reveal the location of high cards which might help declarer make the contract.*

When declarer leads, your spot play can show count when you follow suit and attitude when you discard. A count signal can be very helpful if your partner must decide how many times to holdup an Ace against a no trump contract. For example, suppose the contract is **3NT** and declarer leads the ♣**K** from dummy. Since your attitude toward

clubs should be obvious to your partner, you can play low followed by high on the first two club tricks to tell your partner you have an odd count in clubs. If your partner has the ♣**A**, your count will help your partner decide how many times to holdup the Ace.

SHOW ODD COUNT
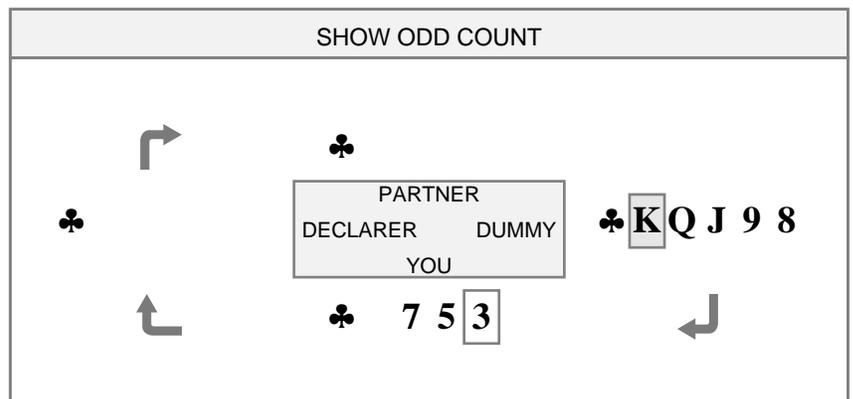
In the next example, the contract is **3NT**. Declarer leads the ♦**K**, your partner plays the ♦**8** and the dummy plays low. Partners ♦**8**, a relatively high card, looks like the start of a

high-low even count signal. If partner had two diamonds then declarer only had two and you can win the second diamond trick with the Ace. If partner had a singleton diamond, partner will show out on the second diamond trick and you can wait until the third trick to cash the ♦**A**.

SHOW EVEN COUNT