

## SECOND HAND PLAY

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### WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN DECLARER LEADS?

#### INTRODUCTION

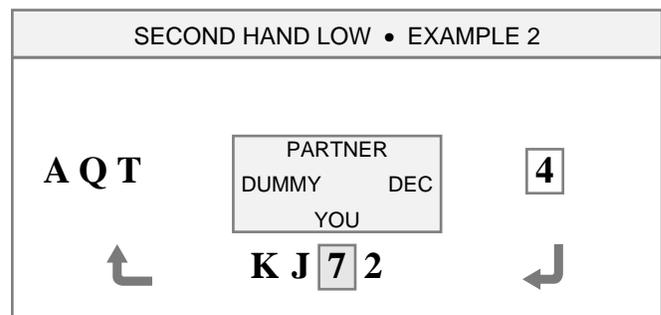
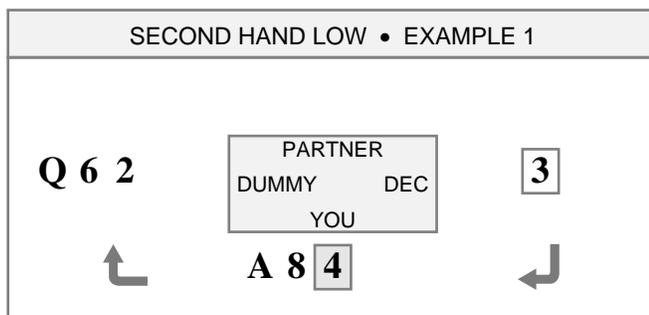
When the first card led to a trick comes from your right you are the *second hand* because you are the second person to play on the trick. Your partner, the fourth hand, has an easier decision because partner will have seen three cards on the trick before making a play. Your decision about what to play is more difficult.

#### SECOND HAND LOW

The most frequently quoted guideline for second hand play is *second hand low* which is short hand for:

When you are second hand after a low card is led  
 and you have an honor in the suit,  
**with nothing else to guide you**  
 play a low spot card on the trick without hesitation.

#### Declarer Leads Low Toward Dummy

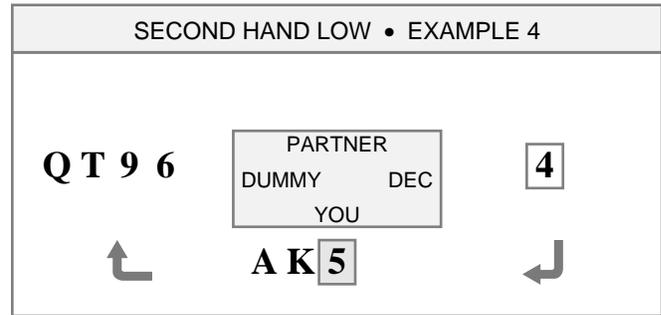
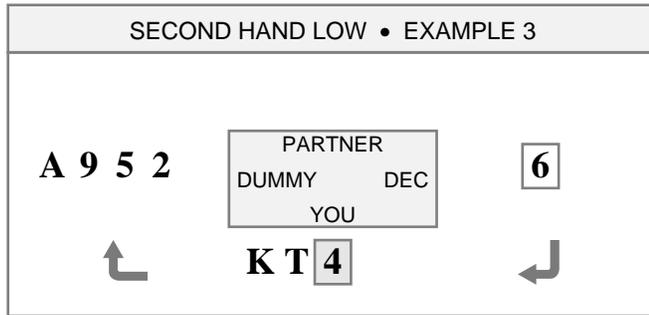


#### Example 1

If the Ace represents the setting trick, play the Ace! Otherwise, play low. If declarer has the King, then keeping the Ace traps the King. If partner has the King then keeping the Ace does not cost a trick.

#### Example 2

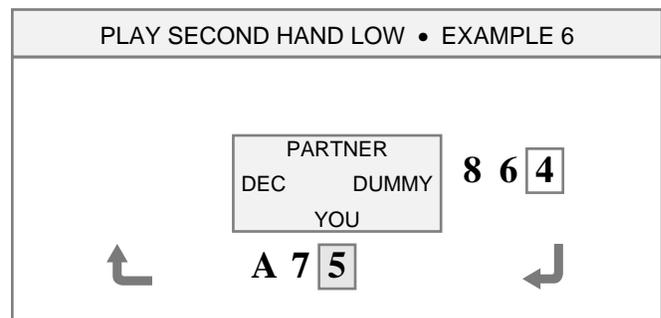
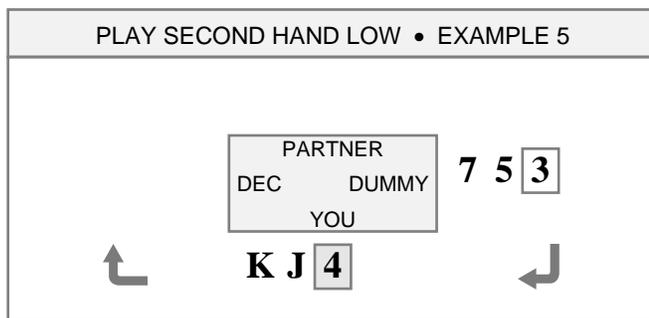
The dummy cards have you beat no matter what you do! Play low without hesitation. Since you have an even count, play the seven instead of the two. If declarer plays dummy's Queen instead of the Ten, one of your honors will take a trick.

*Example 3*

Declarer must be planning to play the Ace. Do not waste the Ten to force the Ace.

*Example 4*

This must be a no trump situation because you would have led the Ace against a suit contract. Against a no trump contract it is usually right to play low.

Dummy Leads Low Toward Declarer*Example 5*

If declarer has the Ace and Queen, your high cards are trapped. Conserve your high cards and make declarer guess where they are located. If you play smoothly, declarer might make an incorrect guess.

*Example 6*

Play low unless the Ace is the setting trick and you think it might be lost. Your partner may have an honor that will take the trick.

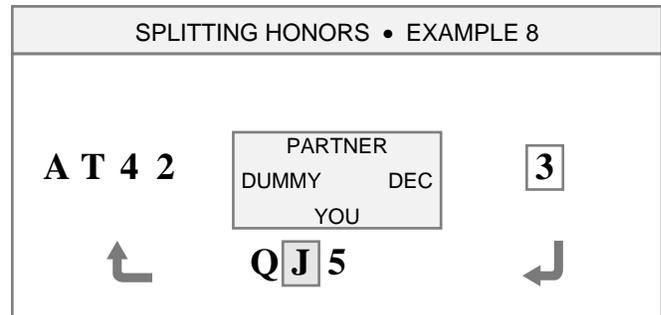
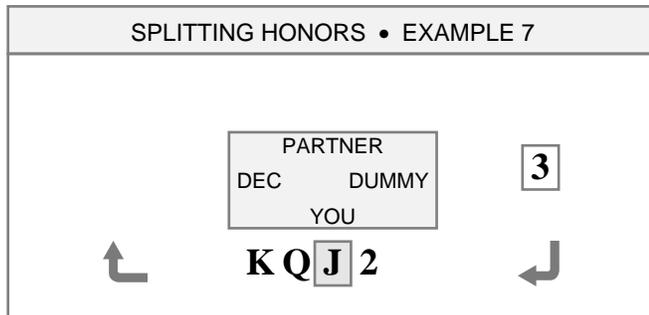
## SECOND HAND NOT SO LOW

There are a number of exceptions to *second hand low* guideline. The three most important are:

- Play *second hand high* if it will defeat the contract.
- Play *second hand high* to take a trick so that you can return partner's suit.
- Split touching honors to promote a winner in your hand or partner's hand.

## Splitting Honors

You do not want to waste any of your high cards. But when the lead is low and you have touching honors, it is usually correct to play as high a card as necessary to prevent declarer from getting a cheap trick. This is called *splitting your honors*.



### Example 7

If declarer has the Ace and Ten and you play low, declarer might decide to play the Ten and try for a cheap trick. Split your honors by playing the Jack, the lowest of equal cards.

### Example 8

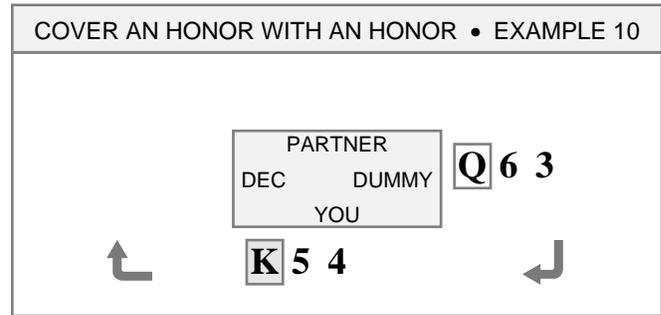
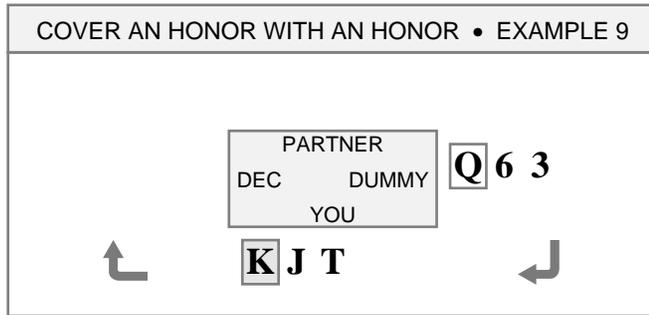
With nothing else to go on, split your honors by playing the Jack, the lowest of equal cards. This prevents declarer from inserting the Ten and taking a cheap trick. If your partner has the King and declarer plays the Ace, you have promoted partner's King. If declarer has the King you either take the trick or promote your Queen into an eventual winner.

## COVERING AN HONOR WITH AN HONOR

The *second hand low* guideline applies when the lead is a low card. When the lead is a high card, the guideline that often applies is *cover an honor with an honor*. This is shorthand for:

When you are second hand after an honor is led  
and you have a higher honor in the suit,  
**with nothing else to guide you**  
cover the honor with your honor.

The reason for this guideline is that you **either** take the trick **or** you force declarer to play a higher card which might promote a lower card in your hand or your partner's hand.



### Example 9

Declarer is probably leading toward the Ace. If you play low and declarer plays low, declarer will get a successful finesse. By playing the King you force declarer to play the Ace and you establish your Jack and Ten. In the unlikely event that your partner has the Ace, you prevent declarer from getting any tricks in the suit.

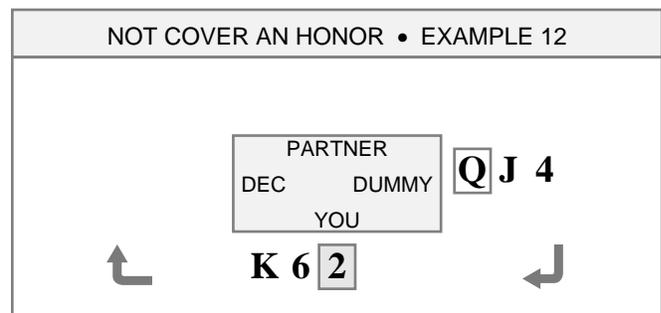
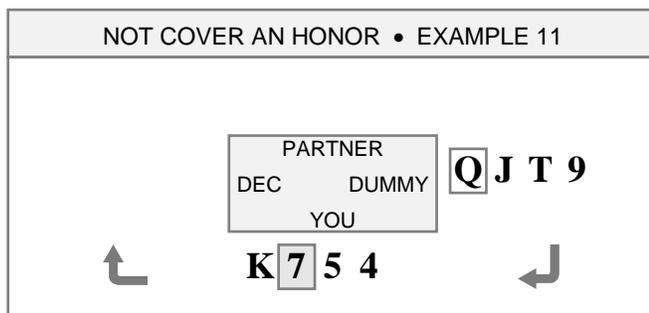
### Example 10

You have nothing to promote in your hand. But partner might have something in the suit. By playing the King you either take the trick or force declarer to play the Ace. This could establish a Jack in partner's hand.

## NOT COVERING AN HONOR WITH AN HONOR

As usual, there are exceptions to the *cover an honor with an honor* guideline. These include:

- Do not cover when you have nothing to promote (*Example 11*).
- Do not cover the first honor led from touching honors in the dummy (*Example 12*).



### Example 11

You have nothing to promote and neither does your partner. If you cover, you might force declarer to play the Ace but the dummy is established. Save the King to block declarer from taking four tricks in the suit. In the unlikely event that partner has the Ace, playing low does no harm and is the best play if partner's Ace is a singleton. Since you have an even count, play the seven instead of the four.

### Example 10

When you see several honors in the dummy, the guideline is to cover the last high card when it is led. Save the King to cover the Jack when it is led.