# 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ Hand Defensive Play

The defenders need to use their honours in the most productive way possible. For example, a king is there to beat a queen, jack or maybe the 10, but not to beat a 2 or 3, unless there is no choice.

There are accepted rules on how to play your honour cards, depending on the circumstances of each hand.
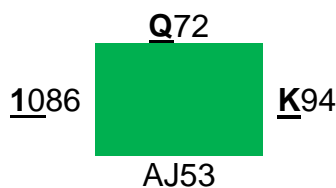
1. Second Hand Play

a) Generally, play low when a low card is led towards an honour in dummy

Dummy
Q76

AJ**4**

3
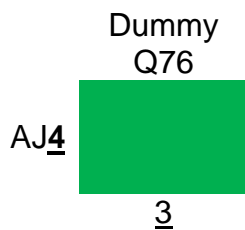
○ Declarer leads the 3, 2ⁿᵈ hand (West) should play low.
○ It is possible that partner may have the king, but if South has the king, West will now win two tricks

b) Cover an honour with an honour hoping to promote a trick.

Q72

1086   **K**94

AJ53

○ When the queen is played, you must cover with your king.
○ It is likely declarer will have the jack, but partner could have the 10. If so, then on the 3rd round, partner's 10 will become a trick.

c) Cover the **second** of two touching honours.

J106

**Q**94   K7**5**

A83**2**
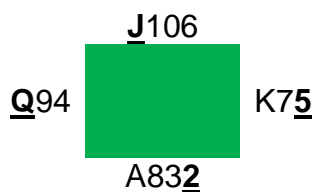
When the jack is played, do not cover with your king. When declarer plays the 10, cover with your king hoping partner has the 9. That will gain you another trick.

d) Another example on the same theme.

QJ9

104**2**   K7**6**

A85**3**
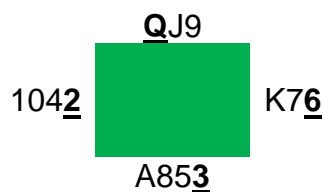
Again, do not cover the 1ˢᵗ honour played from dummy or declarer will then finesse partner's 10. However, cover the jack when it is played, which will gain a trick if partner has the 10. Try this at home with a pack of cards.

e) Don't cover if it will promote tricks for declarer.

J1098

54**2**   Q7**6**

AK**3**
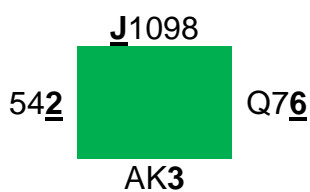
- o Do not cover any honour played from dummy.
- o If you do, they will score all four tricks in this suit.
- o Instead, play low on each occasion. Declarer may score three tricks, but you hope they will be unable to get back to dummy to play the last card.

f) Don't cover if you have greater length in the suit than dummy.

AQ**3**

K54**2**   7**6**

J1098
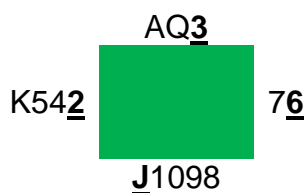
- o You can see that you hold four cards (K542) and dummy only has three cards (AQ3).
- o As long as you d**o not** cover the jack, you must eventually get a trick.

g) Don't cover with the queen of trumps.

K**J**109

54   Q7**2**

A863
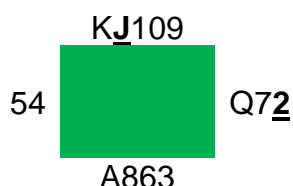
Remember declarer is desperately looking for this important card. Let them guess what to do - they may play the AK and hope the Q will drop, or they may finesse the other way and you will win this valuable trump trick. **Play low smoothly.**

2. Third Hand Play

Generally, if partner leads low, third hand plays a high card – think before you play!

a) If partner leads a small card, play high when dummy has no honour.

87**5**

3   **K**94

AJ**3**
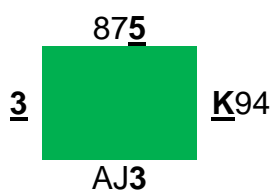
- o You have no choice but to play the highest card.
- o If partner has led a small card they should have an honour themselves, so it will not be a wasted card.

b) Partner leads a small card and dummy has no honour, play the **lowest** of touching honours – partner can now work out that you may have the missing honours.

87**5**

3   KQ**J**

A103
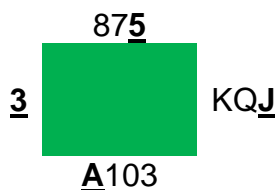
- o When you play the jack and declarer has to win with the ace, your partner can rightly assume you have the queen and maybe the king.
- o If you play the king, partner will never believe you have the queen and jack.

c) If dummy has an honour but plays low, you play high.

K8**4**

3   **Q**107
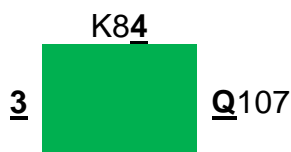
You must play an honour. In this case play the queen, because it may win the trick. If you hold touching honours or the AQ, then play the lowest honour.

d) If dummy has an honour and plays low, and you have an honour that can beat dummy's honour, then play a surrounding card. You retain your higher honour to capture dummy's honour.

K8**4**

3   A**J**7
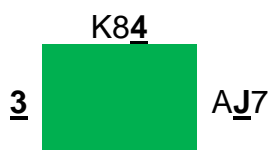
Play the jack and allow declarer to win if they have the queen. You have retained your higher honour (ace) to beat dummy's king. If partner has the queen then declarer won't get a trick.

e) If partner leads an honour card, showing a sequence, play an encouraging card (low) if you also have an honour.

107**6**

A   Q94**3**
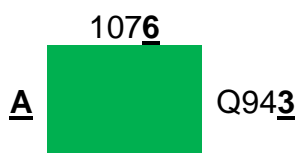
o On partner's lead of the ace (promising the king), encourage partner by playing a low card (3).
o Partner now knows you want them to continue the suit.

107**6**

K   J9**3**
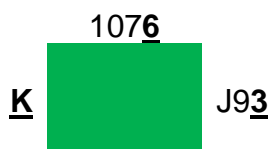
On partner's lead of the King (showing the Queen), encourage partner with the 3 because you have the Jack.

f) If partner leads an ace, showing the king against a suit contract, use an encouraging signal if you have a doubleton.

J7**6**

A   9**2**
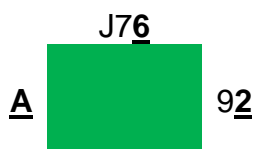
On partner's lead of the ace (promising the king), you will be able to ruff the 3rd round of the suit. Therefore, encourage by playing a low card.

3. More Defensive Tips

When returning partner's lead - with 2 cards remaining, lead back the top.
When returning partner's lead - with 3 cards remaining, lead back the lowest.

a) **Returning partner's lead** - with two cards remaining, lead back the top.

765
2   A93
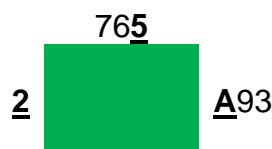
After you have won with the ace, you have the 9 and 3 remaining. Lead back the top card (9). Partner now knows you have no more than two cards left.

b) **Returning partner's lead** - with 3+ cards remaining, lead back the lowest.

765
4   A1082
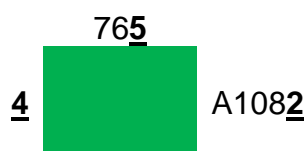
o After you have won the ace, you have the 1082 remaining. Lead back the lowest card (2).
o Partner now knows you have at least three cards left.

c) **Hold-up play** - to stop declarer getting to dummy's tricks. Don't take your winner immediately

KQJ75
A84   92
1063
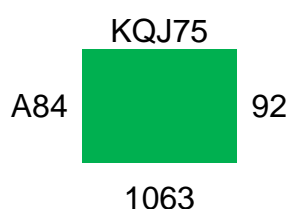
o **Dummy has no other entry to this good suit.**
o When declarer plays the 10, then the king, do not play your ace. Wait until the 3rd round and then win with your ace.
o Declarer will not be able to get to the last two winning cards in dummy

d) **Ducking in a notrump contract.** It is often right to duck a trick to keep communication with partner. If declarer must win a trick, let them win it early.

76
K9842   A103
QJ5
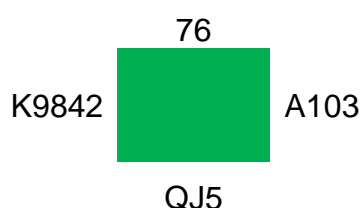
o Lead the 2 to partner's ace, and when the 10 is returned, duck by playing a small card from your hand. South will win with the jack.
o Later on, you will have the communication from **either** hand to play the king and enjoy the remaining two winners

e) Lead through strength and up to weakness.

Dummy
♠ KJ75
♥ 843
♦ AQ72
♣ 93

o West should lead spades or diamonds
o East on the other hand, would lead a heart or club