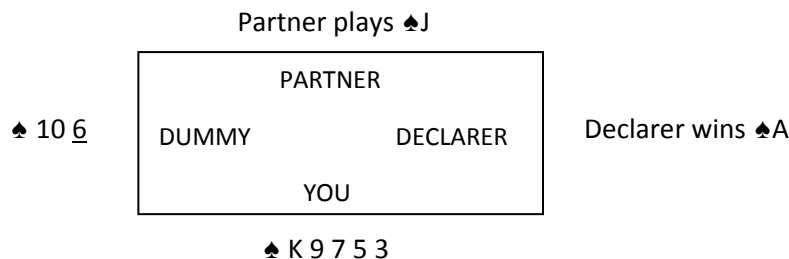


## SEEING THROUGH THE BACKS OF THE CARDS – THIRD HAND PLAY

In the below examples, you are South defending 3NT after West raises East's 1NT opening to 3NT.

### EXAMPLE 1



Leading from your side's long suit is the norm when defending a NT contract so you chose a spade lead. Without three touching or nearly touching high cards, the normal lead is fourth-best so you lead the ♠5 (underlined above). Declarer calls the ♠6 from dummy (underlined). Partner's and declarer's plays to the first trick are shown above.

It can help you keep track of the cards in a suit that interests you if you **focus on the top five cards in that suit**. Declarer has played the ♠A. You have the ♠K. Partner played the ♠J. Dummy has the ♠10. So the only top card you have not placed is the ♠Q.

Declarer's play at trick one is a big help in doing that. Doesn't it make sense that declarer would have won the ♠Q instead of the ♠A? With you having the ♠K, the ♠Q would not be a sure trick and declarer's only chance to win it might have been at trick one. So it looks like partner has the ♠Q.

Suppose you get the lead in another suit later in the hand. Should you lead another spade? Yes, the thinking we did at trick one tells you that you won't give declarer an undeserved trick by continuing spades. Which spade will you lead? ♠3. Play like declarer does and use the high card from the short side first – lead the ♠3 to partner's ♠Q. If partner can return a third spade, you will win four spades.

### EXAMPLE 2

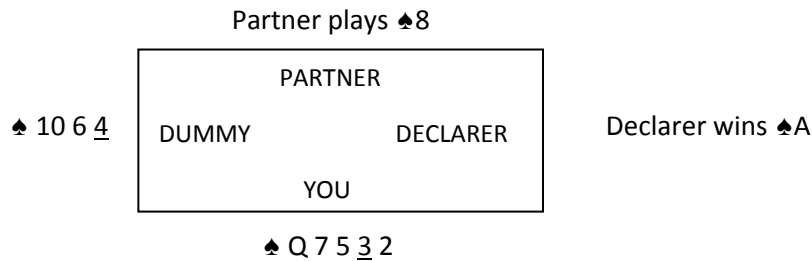


Again, you lead the ♠5 against 3NT. Dummy plays the ♠6 and partner plays the ♠Q, won by declarer's ♠A. Who has the ♠J?

Holding the ♠Q J, partner would have played the ♠J – **third hand only as high as necessary**. So declarer has the ♠J. Should you lead another spade if you regain the lead? No. It's not very likely that declarer has a singleton ♠J left so leading another spade is likely to allow declarer to win the ♠J, a trick he doesn't deserve when you hold the ♠K 10 over him. **There are suits that are only safe for one defender to lead**. That is the case in spades. You have to get to partner's hand to get the lead *through* declarer's ♠J in order to trap it.

Suppose partner started with ♠Q 8 2. The ♠Q went on trick one, leaving partner with the doubleton ♠8 2. When partner does gain the lead, he should return the ♠8, top of the remaining doubleton. **When returning partner's lead, we follow similar guidelines to those for leading partner's suit on opening lead; top of a doubleton and low from 3 or 4 cards**. Doing this helps the opening leader know when her suit is ready to run.

Example 3

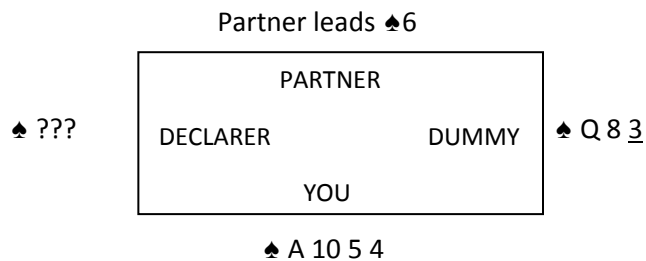


You lead the fourth-best ♠3 against 3NT. Dummy plays the ♠4 and partner plays the ♠8. Declarer wins the ♠A. How do you place the unseen cards around the table?

There is no rule for declarer to play the lower of equals so declarer could easily have the ♠K. In fact, declarer should have that card. If partner had the ♠K, she would have played it on the first trick because third hand tries as hard as possible to win the trick. Since you are looking at the ♠Q, you know the ♠K would do a better job than the ♠8 partner played. Should we also give declarer the ♠J?

Absolutely not. Why would declarer hold onto the ♠J, a card that your ♠Q can beat if she could have won the first trick with it? Partner must have the ♠J and, by the same reasoning, also has the ♠9. Partner started with the ♠J 9 8, all of which are equal once dummy's ♠10 is not played. That means declarer started with a doubleton ♠A K.

EXAMPLE 4

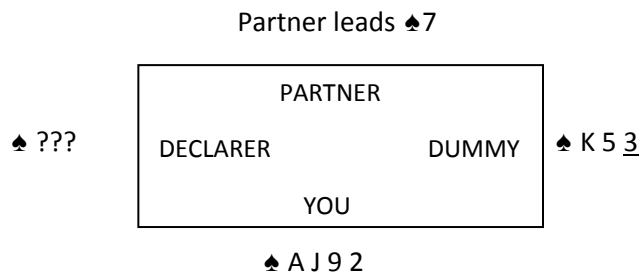


Let's turn the tables so that your partner is leading and the dummy is on your right. Partner leads the ♠6 and dummy plays the ♠3. What do you play from the holding pictured?

If you play the ♠A, do you see that dummy's ♠Q is guaranteed to win a trick no matter who has the ♠K? Even worse, if declarer has the ♠K, playing the ♠A gives declarer two spade stoppers. The defenders can finesse just like declarer finesses. Will your ♠10 and ♠A do the same job? You don't know but playing the ♠10 does give you the chance to use your ♠A on dummy's ♠Q. Playing the ♠10 is a form of the finesse. You don't know that it will win but playing the ♠10 can prevent declarer from having two spade stoppers.

There is another factor in play here. When partner leads fourth best (as we suspect the ♠6 lead is), you can use **The Rule of 11** to calculate how many cards declarer has that can beat the card partner led. *Subtract the number on the card partner led from 11. The result is the total number of cards higher than partner's led card in dummy, your hand, and declarer combined.* 11-6 = 5. You can see dummy's ♠Q 8 and your ♠A 10. That leaves declarer with only one card that can beat the ♠6. It might be the ♠K, but it could be the ♠J or even the ♠9. Take some time to work out that playing the ♠A will give declarer an undeserved second spade trick when declarer has the ♠K. When declarer has the ♠J, she is entitled to a spade trick anyway. Third hand sometimes finesses and you should finesse the ♠10. If declarer wins the ♠J, your side will run spades when you get in again. If declarer wins the ♠K, your partner must lead *through* dummy's protected queen next and she must lead a high enough card to force out the ♠Q. so you don't have to play your ♠A "on air."

EXAMPLE 5



Again you are defending 3NT. Partner leads the ♠7. Dummy's ♠3 is played. What card will you play?

If you want to play the ♠J instead of the ace, you are on the right track. There is a problem with the play of the jack though. Your jack wins the trick. The bad news is that you now have the lead and you cannot continue leading spades without setting up dummy's king. Partner has to lead through dummy's strength to trap it. Once you understand the need for a specific defender to attack a certain suit to maximize the defenders' tricks, you will have made a huge step toward becoming a better defender. Sadly, if partner has no quick entry, your side will not be able to run spades once you win the first trick even if you do finesse.

Could you have done anything different? Apply the Rule of 11:  $11 - 7 = 4$ . There are four spades higher than the spade partner led between your hand, dummy and declarer. How many can you see at trick one? One in dummy and three higher spades in your own hand. Declarer cannot beat the ♠7. You could have let the ♠7 win the first trick so partner could retain the lead and continue spades, trapping dummy's ♠K.

When you know that partner is leading fourth best from length, The Rule of Eleven can sometimes help you find the right play. However, you must know that the opening lead is actually fourth-best from length, a common lead in notrump.

When you play the ♠2 at trick one, don't worry that it looks like a discouraging card. If partner isn't smart enough to realize she's on to a good thing when the ♠7 wins the first trick, you need a new partner.

Both opening leader's partner and declarer can use the Rule of 11.

With the realization that you actually do know a lot about the unseen cards and a bit of practice you will be able to see through the backs of cards just like the experts do.