

Defending No Trump Contracts – In Third Seat

Third seat (or third hand) is the partner of the opening leader.

Review of Leads

Good leads are:

- A suit bid by partner, especially if it was an overcall
- A suit not shown by the opponents
- A suit headed by an honour sequence
- Fourth highest of a suit headed by an honour

What can we Learn from Partner's Lead?

If partner leads...

A low card

We know that...

Partner has at least one honour in the suit. If partner has more than one honour, the honours will not be adjacent. Partner may have as few as three cards in the suit but usually has four or more.

An honour

If you can see a lot of cards in the suit (in dummy and your own hand), it may well be a doubleton; it may also be the middle card of a suit headed by non-adjacent honours.

Usually, partner has led from an honour sequence and will have the next lower card in the suit. If the lead was from an internal honour sequence, partner has a higher non-adjacent honour.

A high card - not an honour

Partner does not have an honour in the suit.

If it is a suit you have bid

It may well be a short suit.

The Rule of Eleven

If your partner leads a card that you think is the fourth highest, subtract the number on the card from eleven. The answer is the number of cards that can beat the card led not counting the cards held by partner.

Here's how it works:

	Dummy	
West	♠ J 9 6	East
♠ 5	South	♠ Q T 8
	♠ ?	

The ♠5 is led. Dummy goes down. By the rule of eleven, there are 11 less 5 = 6 cards not in partner's hand that can beat the ♠5.

Three of these are in dummy and three are in your own hand. Hence, declarer does not have a card to beat the five. If the six is played from dummy, play the eight. If the nine is played, play the ten. If the jack is played, play the queen. Whichever is the case, you will win the trick.

Third Hand Plays High

This is the default play; third hand plays the highest available card in the suit. There are a great many exceptions to this rule but we will start with situations where the rule applies.

Partner leads a small card and dummy has only small cards.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has
♠ 2	♠ 8 6 3	♠ K J 4

The lead of the two suggests a four card suit headed by an honour. The suit cannot be longer than four cards because partner has led fourth highest.

Play the king no matter what card is played from dummy.

Partner leads a small card. Dummy has an honour and small cards.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has
♠ 4	♠ K 6 2	♠ Q T 7 3

Again, partner probably has four spades. It can't be five because the two of spades is in dummy and the three is in your hand.

If a low card is played from dummy, play the queen. If the king is played from dummy, play a low card.

Play Low from Equals

Equals are adjacent cards like KQ or JT. When third hand has a choice of playing one of the equal cards, the choice should **always** be the lowest.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has
♠ 2	♠ 8 6 3	♠ Q J 4

Play the jack.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has
♠ 4	♠ J 6 3	♠ T 9 8

Play the eight.

When Dummy's Honour is Surrounded

- If: (1) Dummy has an honour and
(2) Third hand has both a higher honour and a lower honour or a nine...

... dummy's honour is **surrounded**.

If a low card is played from dummy, third hand should play the lower honour (or nine).

Examples

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has	
♠ 2	♠ Q 6 3	♠ K J 8	The queen is surrounded with no gaps.

The lead of a low card means partner has an honour and it can only be the ten or the ace. Partner is unlikely to lead from a four card suit headed by a ten, so the honour is more likely to be the ace.

If dummy plays low, play the jack. If dummy plays the queen, play the king.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has	
♠ 2	♠ Q 6 3	♠ K T 8	The queen is surrounded but there is a gap below the queen.

Again, the low lead signifies an honour. Partner has either the ace or the jack; or possibly both. If dummy plays low, play the ten. If dummy plays the queen, play the king.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has	
♠ 3	♠ Q 6 5	♠ K 9 7 2	There is a big gap below the queen.

Partner has the ace or the jack or the ten or some combination of these. If dummy plays low, play the nine. If dummy plays the queen, play the king.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has	
♠ 3	♠ Q 6 5	♠ A 9 7 2	There are gaps above and below the queen.

EXCEPTION: This is an exception to the general rule. The cards in third hand are ace and nine. Now, the gap is too big. Play the ace no matter what card is played from dummy.

What can the Opening Leader deduce from Third Seat's Play?

	Dummy	
West	♠ 8 5 4 <u>3</u>	East
♠ K 9 7 <u>6</u> 2	South	♠ <u>J</u>
	♠ <u>A</u>	

West led the ♠6, dummy played the three, East the jack and declarer the ace.

What does West know?

Declarer must have the ten because East would play lower of equals.
 East must have the queen. Otherwise, declarer would have won the trick with that card.
 Both East and declarer have one card left in the suit.
 When next on lead, West can run the suit.

	Dummy	
West	♠ T 6 <u>5</u>	East
♠ Q 7 4 <u>3</u> 2	South	♠ <u>8</u>
	♠ <u>K</u>	

West led the ♠3, dummy played the five, East the eight and declarer the king.

What does West know?

Declarer must have the ace because East did not play it.
 East must have the jack and the nine because declarer could have won with those cards.
 Declarer has one card left in the suit since all spades are accounted for. Since it is the ace, West's next play of spades should be the two.

	Dummy	
West	♠ T 6 <u>5</u>	East
♠ Q 7 4 <u>3</u> 2	South	♠ <u>9</u>
	♠ <u>K</u>	

West led the ♠3, dummy played the five, East the nine and declarer the king.

What does West know?

Declarer must have the ace because East did not play it.
 East must have the jack because declarer could have won with that card.
 Declarer must have the eight because East would have played the lower of equals.
 Again, West can play the two of spades when next on lead. East's jack will knock out declarer's ace.

	Dummy	
West	♠ T 6 <u>5</u>	East
♠ Q 9 4 <u>3</u> 2	South	♠ <u>8</u>
	♠ <u>J</u>	

West led the ♠3, dummy played the five, East the eight and declarer the jack.

What does West know?

Declarer must have the ace and king because East did not play either of them.
 Declarer must have the seven because East would have played the lower of equals.
 East's eight was a singleton because all other spades are accounted for.
 There is no point in West continuing the spade suit.

Deal 1

	North	
	♠ K T 9 8 ♥ A K ♦ J 9 4 ♣ K Q 7 2	
West		East
♠ Q J 7 3 ♥ 9 8 7 ♦ T 6 5 ♣ 6 4 3		♠ 5 4 2 ♥ Q 5 4 3 2 ♦ K Q 2 ♣ A T
	South	
	♠ A 6 ♥ J T 6 ♦ A 8 7 3 ♣ J 9 8 5	

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

North-South showed no interest in the majors. East knows that West has a weak hand and so hearts is a better bet than spades. Lead the fourth highest, ♥3.

Dummy plays ♥6. When West plays ♥7, the lowest of equals, East knows:

- North has the ace and king because West didn't play them.
- West must have the eight and nine as North didn't play them.

North wins the first trick and starts on clubs. East wins. With declarer known to have a doubleton AK, the two of hearts will knock out declarer's ace. Later, East will get the lead with a diamond or West will win a spade. Now, the defence cash three heart tricks.

If declarer plays spades, first the ace and then the six, West must play the jack to force out the King. Otherwise, a sneaky declarer may win a trick with the ten.

Deal 2

	North	
	♠ 9 8 5 4 ♥ Q J 9 ♦ K 6 ♣ K T 6 4	
West		East
♠ J 7 3 2 ♥ A 8 6 3 ♦ 5 2 ♣ 8 7 5		♠ A K Q ♥ K T 5 ♦ Q J T 7 4 ♣ A J
	South	
	♠ T 6 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ A 9 8 3 ♣ Q 9 3 2	

West	North	East	South
		2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

3♣ is Stayman and 3♦ denied a four-card major.

South leads ♦3 from the stronger four card suit. In third seat, North plays ♦K, the highest diamond.

North knows that South has four diamonds because the three was led and the two is in dummy. That means declarer has five diamonds.

There is no point continuing the diamond suit so North should switch to a club, playing the four (fourth highest). Now, the defence will take three clubs which along with the two diamond tricks will beat the contract.

Deal 3

	North	
	♠ Q 6 5 ♥ K J 6 ♦ J 9 6 ♣ K 4 3 2	
West		East
♠ J 7 4 3 ♥ T 7 ♦ T 7 4 3 ♣ A 6 5		♠ A T 9 2 ♥ 9 8 4 2 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ 9 7
	South	
	♠ K 8 ♥ A Q 5 3 ♦ K Q 2 ♣ Q J T 8	

West North East South

Pass 3NT All Pass Pass 1NT

West leads the ♠3, preferring a major to a minor. The ♠5 comes from dummy. East has ♠Q surrounded and plays ♠9, lower of equals. Declarer wins with the king and leads back the ♣8.

East knows that partner has four spades because the three was led and East has the two. Therefore, declarer has just two spades. East also knows that partner has a spade honour (a low card was led).

What does West know? South must have ♠8 since East would play the lower of equals. East must have the ♠10, since declarer could have won with that. Sooner or later, West will win the ♣A and play another spade. If North plays low, East wins with the ten, knowing that partner has the only remaining honour, the jack.

If East plays the ♠A at trick one, declarer makes an extra spade trick and the contract.

Deal 4

	North	
	♠ A Q 8 5 4 ♥ 5 4 3 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 7 2	
West		East
♠ K 2 ♥ K Q 9 ♦ K Q J T 2 ♣ A T 3		♠ 9 7 6 ♥ T 8 6 ♦ A 7 6 5 ♣ K 9 5
	South	
	♠ J T 3 ♥ A J 7 2 ♦ 8 4 ♣ J 8 6 4	

West North East South

1♦ 1♠ 2♦ 2♠
3NT Pass Pass Pass

North leads the fourth-highest ♠5. Dummy plays the six, South the ten and declarer wins with the king.

Declarer now plays a low diamond to the ace and then leads back a heart. It is South to play. What does South know?

By the rule of eleven, there are six cards outside North's hand higher than the five. Three are in dummy and South has two.

Declarer can have only one card higher than the five and that has already gone. So North's spades must be AQ854 or AQ852. Since East-West probably have 25 points to have bid game, North is unlikely to have an outside entry.

With the play on hearts, declarer is trying to steal a ninth trick before the defence take all their spades. South must go up with the ace and lead back the ♠J.