

More on the “3rd Hand Rule;” guiding your 3rd hand play

In the 3 hands below when you use the Rule of 11 you will see that declarer has 3 cards higher than the opening lead. The 3rd Hand Rule still works.

More on the 3rd Hand Rule

In each hand below, partner starts the 4 and in each hand, the cards in your hand and in dummy do not change; only partner's and declarer's hands change. In each case declarer calls low from dummy.

The 3rd Hand Rule can still work even if declarer has 3 cards higher. More important are your cards, especially the size of your 2nd card if dummy holds an honor smaller than yours.

1. Dummy: Q73
Partner: 9854 You: KT2
Declarer: AJ6

The proper lead is the 9 but our partner led 4th best from nothing, a poor lead. Assuming declarer calls low from dummy, the 3rd Hand Rule says play the Ten. Declarer wins the J but they can't continue the suit for 3 tricks if we defend right. Say declarer wins the J and leads the 6, and partner correctly plays the 8 not the silly 5 (second hand low is wrong here). Dummy's Q can never score a trick. Your side scores a trick.

If you rise with the K on trick one declarer scores 3 tricks.

Note how much easier things are if partner starts the 9, the correct lead. When dummy plays low, you play low, your deuce. You still have the KT sitting over dummy's Q7.

2. Dummy: Q73
Partner: A954 You: KT2
Declarer: J86

Here partner led the 4 from A954. When you play Ten, declarer wins the J but your side gets the next 3.

NOTE: Declarer holds Qxx opposite Jxx and always scores a trick.

3. Dummy: Q73
Partner: AJ54 You: KT2
Declarer: 986

This time when you play the Ten it wins and you take the entire suit.

Use the 3rd Hand Rule. Partner leads 4th best at NT and you see an honor in dummy, K, Q or J. If you hold 3 with a higher honor than dummy and your second card is the card one or two below dummy's honor, play the second highest card. Don't play 3rd hand high.

Note: Beware the rules you learn early in your bridge since they are not always right. We have learned that it is often wrong for 3rd hand to play high.

In example 1 above, as the opening leader, if declarer wins and returns the 6 you must play 2nd hand HIGH, the 8. In all 3 examples, in 3rd chair you must NOT play 3rd hand high.