

THIRD-HAND PLAY AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

When Partner Leads an Honor

If there is an honor in dummy that is possibly finessable by means of the card partner led, Scanian signals apply. See section 1-6, Signals in Notrump Defense.

Showing Attitude

When the lead is the queen (from KQ..), a high card shows possession of the jack or ace, not a doubleton.

If the lead is the king of a suit that third hand has raised, play second highest (or queen from QJ) when holding the queen. Otherwise play the lowest card. Do not try to show count.

If the lead is the queen of suit that third hand has raised, play second-highest (or jack from J10) when holding the jack. Otherwise play the lowest card. Do not try to show count.

Showing Count

Playing high-low on partner's lead of the king, then ace, of a suit you have not raised asks shows a doubleton. When dummy has the queen with length and you don't want the suit continued, you must nevertheless play high from a doubleton. Playing low would show a singleton. It is very unethical to think and then play low from a doubleton, telling partner it is not a singleton. With three or more cards, play the lowest: negative attitude, not count, and not suit preference (usually).

Against a slam, third hand should give count, not attitude, so partner can tell whether the ace will cash. If you have shown at least three cards by a raise during the auction, it's also right to show count when the queen is in dummy: high with an even number, lowest from an odd number. Do this also when declarer is known to have seven or more trumps, making it likely that he is short in the suit led..

Jxx

Q led

Axx (x) (x)

West leads the queen (from KQ) and will know that East has the ace when it holds. East should signal count, not attitude, playing high with four and low with three or five.

K73

Q1042

J85

A96

If declarer plays dummy's king on the lead of the 2, West will know that East has the jack. East should therefore show count with the 5 rather than play the 8 or the jack (which would show an even number of cards).

When signaling from a suit known to contain at least six cards, choose a card that indicates length as well as attitude. E.g., play the 9 to encourage with seven cards, the 8 with six cards.

The King/Queen Play to the Lead of the Ace

When an ace is led against a suit contract and third hand is known to have length in the suit:

- If he plays the queen, he demands a shift
- If he plays the king, he demands a continuation (even with a singleton in dummy)
- To merely suggest a shift or a continuation, do not follow with the king or the queen.

Queen Play to the Lead of the King

As is well known, the play of the queen under partner's lead of the king from AK shows the ability to win the next trick, either by ruffing or with the jack. This can be helpful when declarer doesn't want to win the second trick in his hand.

Some say the queen *demand*s an underlead of the ace. This is too unimaginative. If the opening leader sees a better line of defense he should feel free to follow that path. With QJ third hand should play the queen without having a particular reason, as the leader may be able to make good use of this information.

This means you usually must not play the queen from Qx when partner leads the king. If the jack is in dummy, however, it's okay to play high-low and this does not necessarily show a singleton.

Showing Suit Preference

As a general rule third hand cannot give a suit-preference signal on an opening lead won by the leader. A high card means continue, a low card means don't continue. A singleton in dummy does not mean the leader should automatically switch, as third hand may prefer forcing dummy to ruff. This could be either to protect a trump holding or to avoid a dangerous shift to another suit. Sometimes third hand's low card just shows no interest in a continuation and is not a suit-preference signal.

When declarer wins, or will win, the opening lead and both defenders can see there is no future in the suit, suit preference has priority over a pointless cover. Say the lead is from three cards and declarer plays dummy's 9 from KQ9. Holding 108732, play the 8 or the 2 for suit preference rather than mindlessly covering the 9. Cover only with no preference for either side suit.

Another reason for not covering or playing third-hand high is to avoid giving the leader an impression that you have strength in the suit. Partner leads a low card and declarer plays low from dummy's K82. Do not play high from small cards, which may give partner the impression that you have a good holding such as AJ109 when declarer wins the queen. Just play low the 6 from 9765.