

TRAVIS-T(ip) #9

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WHEN TO COVER AN HONOUR WITH AN HONOUR

When we learn to play bridge we learn many rules, including:

- Second player plays low, and
- Cover an honour with an honour

You need to learn when it is right to cover an honour with an honour and when it isn't. There are occasions when you definitely should cover an honour and there are times when it's not right, ie when you play low in second position. (By the way, second player plays low is ONLY a defensive rule; declarer can see dummy and should know what to play even in second position.)

Let's look at how these rules really apply.

RULE:

When a low card is led from declarer or dummy, a useful rule is 'second hand low'. Your partner still has to contribute to the trick, and we also prefer to use our aces on kings.

Exceptions:

- Don't play a low card if it will allow declarer to win a trick too cheaply, eg with AK you may need to win the trick, or with KQ or QJ you may need to split your honours.
- Don't play second hand low if by playing high you will defeat the contract.

RULE:

If a high card is led, generally you cover an honour with an honour. The reason we cover an honour with an honour is to try to promote a trick for your side.

Exception:

- If the honour is led from touching honours, wait to cover the LAST of the touching honours.

Let's look at some examples:

EXAMPLE 1:

	DUMMY	
	Q J 9	
		YOU
10 3 2		K 6 5
	DECLARER	
	A 8 7 4	

Declarer leads the Queen from dummy. You should play low...

If you play the King, declarer will win with the Ace and now can finesse your partner's 10, losing no tricks in the suit. However, if you duck the first trick the Queen will win. Declarer now leads the Jack from dummy and this time you cover. When declarer plays the King, your partner's 10 has been promoted into a trick.

This is an example of covering the last honour from the sequence of honours.

However, if you hold the doubleton K10 you should cover the Queen, hoping that declarer finesses next time.

EXAMPLE 2(a):

DUMMY
Q J 10 9

3 2 **YOU**
 K 8 7 6

DECLARER
A 5 4

Declarer leads the Queen from dummy. You should play low...

If you play the King you give declarer four tricks in the suit, whereas if you withhold your King declarer will only make three tricks in the suit. This is another example of covering the last of the sequence which, in this case, is the last card in the suit!

EXAMPLE 2(b):

DUMMY
Q J 10 9

4 3 2 **YOU**
 K 8 7 6

DECLARER
A 5

Declarer leads the Queen from dummy. You should play low...

If you play the King you give declarer four tricks in the suit, whereas if you withhold your King declarer will only have two immediate tricks. If they have enough entries they may be able to create the third trick, but only by losing a trick to your King if it's a no trump contract. If in a suit contract, in order to create the extra trick declarer will have to trump out your King if you do not cover.

EXAMPLE 3(a):

DUMMY
J 3

10 8 5 2 **YOU**
 K 6

DECLARER
A Q 9 7 4

Declarer leads the Jack from dummy. You should cover the Jack with your King, hoping to promote any cards in your partner's hand. If you cover the Jack, both your partner's 10 and 8 will become winners.

EXAMPLE 3(b):

DUMMY
J 3

9 7 5 2 **YOU**
 K 6

DECLARER
A Q 10 8 4

Declarer leads the Jack from dummy. You should cover the Jack with your King, hoping to promote any cards in your partner's hand. If you cover the Jack, your partner's 9 becomes a winner!

[If declarer holds the AQ109, there is nothing you can do to stop the 5 tricks for declarer, but at least you tried.]

This hand can be rotated, so that the AQ1084 are in dummy and you are the 'West' hand. You still cover the Jack from declarer's hand with your King, trying to promote possible tricks in your partner's hand.

EXAMPLE 4:

	DUMMY	
	J 3	
		YOU
7 5		K 8 6 4

DECLARER
A Q 10 9 2

Declarer leads the Jack from dummy. This time you should play low...

You know that your King cannot be finessed because you have too many cards in the suit for declarer to pick up your King by finesses. If you do not cover, declarer will have to give you a trick in order to make his four tricks in the suit. However if you cover, declarer has five tricks in the suit immediately.

EXAMPLE 5:

The other time you should not cover an honour with an honour is when declarer leads the Jack towards dummy with the Ace and small cards:

	DUMMY	
	A 6 4 2	
YOU		
Q 9 5		

Declarer leads the Jack and you should play low. One of two situations exists:

- (a) Declarer is fishing for the Queen, holding KJ10 (and maybe more cards). If you play low smoothly, declarer may win the Ace and finesse your partner for the Queen; or
- (b) Declarer may hold something like J10x (maybe J10xx). If you cover with the Queen, they will win the Ace and lead back towards their now 10x, catching your partner's King on the way through. If this happens, they lose one trick but make three. On the other hand, if you play low on the Jack, your partner's King will win the trick. Next time when declarer leads the 10, you can cover – since your Q9 will now become a second trick for your side.

EXAMPLE 6:

	DUMMY	
	J 3	
		YOU
5 2		K 10 9 8

DECLARER
A Q 7 6 4

Declarer leads the Jack from dummy. You should cover the Jack, because you can see that you can promote your 1098 into two winners if you cover. If you duck the Jack, you know the Jack will win, then declarer can finesse again, losing only one trick in the suit instead of two!

So remember, you cover an honour with an honour to try to promote a trick for your side. It may be your cards that you are promoting, but it might also be partner's cards. However, it's important to remember to cover the last of a sequence of honours, especially from dummy.