

Third Hand Low

By Sam Lev

Sam Lev was part of the Israeli team that came third in the Bermuda Bowl in 1976 and 1985. However, he emigrated several years ago and now has residential qualification to play for the USA, all he has to do is qualify through their trials system.

One of the maxims that bridge inherited from whist was 'third hand high'. Another slogan that expressed the same idea was 'never finesse against your partner'.

Since the early days, of course, a great deal has been discovered. My tip describes some quite frequent situations where it may be good play for third hand to finesse against his partner – that is to play the lower of non-touching honors even when dummy has a worthless holding in the suit led.

A common situation occurs at trick one in notrump:

<p>Board 15 South Deals N-S Vul</p>		<p>♠ J 10 9 ♥ A K 9 2 ♦ K Q 10 5 ♣ 5 3</p>	<p>♠ K Q 8 6 2 ♥ Q 8 7 6 ♦ 3 ♣ A J 7</p>
<p>♠ 5 ♥ 4 3 ♦ 9 8 7 4 2 ♣ Q 9 8 4 2</p>		<p>♠ A 7 4 3 ♥ J 10 5 ♦ A J 6 ♣ K 10 6</p>	
<p>West</p>	<p>North</p>	<p>East</p>	<p>South</p>
<p>Pass Pass</p>	<p>1 ♦ 3 NT</p>	<p>Pass All pass</p>	<p>1 ♣ 1 ♠</p>

West leads the four of clubs against South's contract of 3NT. If East puts up the ace (third hand high!) South will duck the next round of clubs and West's suit will be dead. South will be able to develop his ninth trick by taking a heart finesse into the safe hand.

But if East plays the jack of clubs on the first round, it will be too dangerous for South to duck. He would look very foolish if West's clubs were A-Q-9-x-x and a simple heart finesse would have made the contract.

Of course, there is sometimes an element of risk when you finesse against your partner. Here, East will be giving declarer an unnecessary trick if his clubs are Q-x-x. But East can afford to take this risk, for he has control of the major suits and can see that the contract will be defeated if West's club suit can be brought in. East also knows that West cannot possibly have a side entry, so it is essential to establish a lifeline between the defending hands.

TIP: *When you have a holding such as ace-queen or ace-jack in the suit led by partner, do not automatically play third hand high.*

By playing the lower honor you may be able to create a vital entry to your partner's hand.