



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(498) Which Honor to Cover or Capture**

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Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

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#### **General**

Which card to play in a particular situation can be a difficult decision for a defender. The technical details of card play are a large and complicated subject, but we can look at one very important situation on defense to help improve our game - when to cover an honor! At first glance, it seems that we have a simple rule, "Cover an honor with an honor," but unfortunately this is a bit too simplistic. Let's look at when this rule applies and how best to actually use it.

#### **Promotion – Cover an Honor to Create More Winners**

The reason that we attempt to capture or cover an honor with our honor card is to promote the cards under that honor into winners.

#### *Example 1 – Covering an Honor*

Qxx

Kxx

When the dummy has a holding like Qxx and we hold the King behind it, when declarer leads the Queen, generally we should cover with the King. This is an effort to promote the Jack and/or Ten which, if we cannot see either in our hand or the dummy, we hope are in partner's hand.

#### *Example 2 – Covering an Honor When There Are Choices*

QJx

Kxx

If we can see the Jack, like in this example, then we do not need to cover the Queen, because we can cover the Jack later, hoping to promote partner's Ten. When the opponents have both the Queen and the Jack then these two cards are of equivalent value. Covering either one will accomplish the goal of promoting partner's Ten. There is no rush to cover the Queen, so we should be patient and wait to cover the Jack.



### *Example 3 – Not Covering an Honor Too Soon*

QJT

Kxxx

A reason not to cover an honor is that the declarer may have the singleton Ace and may be trying to convince us to play the King. Another reason not to cover immediately is that partner may have the singleton Ace, and if we play the King now it will crash under partner's Ace.

Yet another reason not to cover too soon is that this could be the entire position:

QJT

xxxx

Kxxx

Ax

Covering any of the honors gives declarer 3 tricks, where not covering limits declarer to 2 tricks. Remember the goal of covering an honor is to promote our side's spot cards, but when we can see that the opponents have all the good spot cards then it is best not to cover an honor.

### *Example 4 – Promoting Our Ten*

Another position when covering is complicated is when dummy has the 9 and we want declarer to have to guess how not to lose a trick to the Ten.

QJ9

Xxxx

KTx

Axx

In this example, we can cover either the Queen or the Jack to promote our Ten.

### *Example 5 – Hoping to Promote Our Ten*

If we have only King-Ten doubleton, then we need to cover the first round of the suit in a hope that we can score our Ten when declarer leads up to the J9 and takes the finesse.

QJ9

Xxxxx

KT

Axx

### *Example 6 – Promoting Partner's Spot*

When we have King-doubleton (Kx) then we often must cover the first honor to ensure we get a chance to force the declarer to spend two honors on one trick and hopefully promote partner's spot cards.

QJx

T9xxx

Kx

Axx

Here we cover the Queen on the first round, so that partner can then use one of their Ten and 9 to push out the Jack and develop a winner. If we do not cover the Queen, it will win the trick, and declarer could then play the Ace, dropping our King, and win a trick with each of their three honors with no losers.



### Covering an Honor – Creating a Problem for Declarer

There are a few classic situations where we may or may not cover the first honor to create a position that gives declarer a guess about the layout of the suit.

#### *Example 7 – To Cover or Not to Cover?*

Covering in this position is not at all clear!

```
      QJ9x
Tx           Kxx
      Axxx
```

Here if we cover the Queen, then when declarer leads up towards J9x, partner's Ten will pop up and be easily covered. It is best not to cover so declarer must find the play of leading the Jack off the dummy and "pinning" the Ten to play the suit for no losers.

#### *Example 8 – Giving Declarer a Problem?*

Again, in this position, covering is not at all clear!

```
      QJ9x
Txx           Kx
      Axxx
```

Declarer cannot be so sure of the position because we could be ducking from Kx or from Kxx. If we duck the Queen (on the first round), declarer must guess the position and now decide whether to pin the Ten by leading the Jack or drop our King by leading small from the dummy. Forcing declarer to guess is important because it gives them an opportunity to make a mistake. If we cover the first round, declarer is likely to take a finesse of partner's Ten on the second round (unless declarer thinks we started with KT.)

### Cutting Communication – Win the Proper Honor

Of course, there are reasons other than promotion to win or not win a particular trick – to not "cover an honor with an honor" immediately. One of the most common, especially when defending a NT contract, is that we are trying to cut communication between declarer's hand and dummy. We may accomplish this by holding up until we are exhausted in cards this suit or by holding up until we can make use of a count signal from partner and know when declarer has run out of this suit.

#### *Example 9 – Holding Up as Long as Possible*

When to win our Ace?

```
      KQJxx
      Axx
```

Here we can hold up until the third round of the suit to win our Ace, hoping to cut communication to the hand with the long suit.



*Example 10 – Getting Help from Partner*

Holding up until we are forced to play our Ace is effective at stopping declarer from running this suit, but it may allow declarer to win more tricks than they are entitled to.

KQJ109

872                      A65

43

When the King is led from the dummy, we duck the first round of the suit and get a count signal from partner (the 2 if we play standard carding.) This lets us know that partner started with three cards in the suit and so declarer had only two cards. We now know it is best to win the second round of the suit, cutting communication to the long suit and holding declarer to only one winner in this suit.

*Example 11 – Preventing an Entry*

Another reason to duck an honor is to prevent declarer from entering the other hand (the dummy in this example). Look at this example in a ♥ contract.

♠ --	
♥ --	
♦ Q64	
♣ QJT	
♠ 7	♠ --
♥ --	♥ --
♦ JT9	♦ A82
♣ 76	♣ K53
♠ --	
♥ 7	
♦ K3	
♣ A84	

South, declarer, leads the ♦K from hand. If we win this, then declarer will be able to get to dummy with the ♦Q and then be able to finesse our ♣K. If we duck the ♦K, we can keep declarer off dummy and win a ♦ trick and our ♣K.



### Classic Ducking Play

One other reason to duck or hold up on a trick is to make it more difficult for declarer to make the winning play on the second round of a suit. Consider the following position:

```
      KQTxx
Jxx           Ax
      xxx
```

Declarer leads up to dummy and plays the King. If we take the Ace on the first round, the declarer will likely return to hand (once they regain the lead) and lead up to dummy's Ten - finessing partner out of their Jack. But if we duck the Ace on the first round (smoothly so that no one knows we have it), then declarer will likely come back to their hand and lead up towards dummy again. Now declarer will need to guess between a bunch of situations – two being partner starting with either Axx or AJxx. They will often think partner had Axx and now play the Queen on the second round, not wanting to lose to our Jack. When we win the Ace, now partner's Jack will be a winner as well. This ducking play (if done in tempo) is our best chance to win two tricks in this position.

### Conclusion

Defensive card play allows for a lot of variations and complexity that make defending a hand quite a challenge. The simple rule of "Cover an honor with an honor!" is a good starting point. But the important thing is to understand that the point of this rule is to try to promote the spot cards and other smaller honors for your side. This is key because if you see that the opponents have all the spot cards and smaller honors, then covering an honor cannot help and not covering may save your side a trick. Remember that as a defender it is your job to make life as difficult as possible for declarer. Play your cards in such a way to make this happen!