

PLAYING THE HONOR FROM THE SHORT SIDE FIRST

Before we discuss how to do this, let's discuss what the words, "honor" and "short side" mean in bridge. An honor is a high card. Generally, we consider honors to be Aces, Kings, Queens, and Jacks (in other words, the cards that we count in HCP). Oftentimes, bridge players will count tens as well, especially if you have the other honors to go with it. A short side is a situation in which you have winners (high cards) in a particular suit in both hands. One hand has a short run of cards in that suit (Say an A, K, 3) and the other hand has a longer run of cards in that suit (Say a Q, J, 10, 7, 2). The hand with the fewer number of cards is called the "short side". NOTE: I am addressing this to declarers, here, of course.

The maxim of taking the honors from the short side first means that if you have honors in both hands, play the honors from the short side before you go to the long side. If you do it in reverse, you may not be able to get back to the hand with the length, and you will not capitalize on all those tricks.

Here's an example:

NORTH

Spades- A 3

Hearts- J 7 6 5

Diamonds- 9 7 6 5

Clubs- J 7 5

SOUTH

Spades- K Q J 10 9 8 7 6

Hearts- Q 4

Diamonds- K 2

Clubs- Q

How would you bid this hand? Let's say South was the opener. He would surely open 1 spade. North would respond 1 NT. Why not 2 Hearts? A couple of reasons. First, you generally need 5 hearts to respond at the 2 level to partner's opening bid of 1 spade. Secondly, and more importantly, you need 11 points to go to level 2 while changing the suit. North has 6 points. With 6-10 points, and no support for partner's suit, you can bid 1 NT. But North does have support! Unfortunately, he doesn't know initially how many spades South has!

Let's say South is off his game today, and instead of rebidding 2 spades to show the extra length, he passes on partner's 1 NT, thinking that they don't have enough points to go higher. Or maybe he bids correctly and says 2 spades, and North is off his game, and rebids 2 NT. South then passes, again, a mistake since he should keep bidding his spades. However the problem occurs, let's say they

end up in a contract of either 1 NT or 2 NT. Shouldn't have happened, but it did. Now what?

As North is declarer, the lead comes from East. She leads the 4 of diamonds. South's hand goes down on the table, and North counts her winners. No problem. She counts 8 winners in Spades, and that could easily be it. There is a possible winner in diamonds, if opponents lead an Ace of Diamonds. But leading Aces is not usual in no trump, so that probably won't work.

But declarer needs to be careful playing those spades or she won't make her contract. Here's the correct way to play it: As soon as she gets the lead, she starts with the Ace of spades, then plays the 3 to the spades in the dummy. That way she makes all the spades good. After that, she might want to lead the Q of hearts, hoping to bring out opponent's Ace or King, and maybe help her Jack to get a trick later. But even if nothing else works, she makes a contract of 1 NT or 2 NT. She has successfully played the honor from the short side first.

What if she doesn't? What if she thinks it doesn't matter? As soon as she gets the lead, she starts with the 3 of spades in her hand, and wins it with the K in the dummy. Now, whatever spade she plays in the dummy, she must beat it with the Ace in her hand, since it's all she has. How does she get back to the other Spades? She can't. Unless she magically makes tricks in the other suits, which is not that likely, she will not make more than 2 tricks in spades, as she can't get back to the board. Her opponents will move heaven and earth to keep her from getting to the board, since they see those gorgeous spades and want to keep her from them. Contract defeated.

PRACTICE: Imagine you are playing each hand in a contract of 3 NT. Do you agree with the contract? Plan how you will make the contract. Think about the strategy we learned today and use it in your planning.

Hand # 1

NORTH

Spades- A K 6 4

Hearts- Q 2

Diamonds- J 5 2

Clubs- J 9 7 6

SOUTH

Spades- 10 2

Hearts- K J 10 8

Diamonds- A K Q 10 5

Clubs- A 5

Hand # 2

NORTH

Spades- J 5 4 3

Hearts- Q 3

Diamonds- A K Q J 5

Clubs- Q 7

SOUTH

Spades- A K 2

Hearts- A 10 9 7 6

Diamonds- 10 9 2

Clubs- A 6

SAMPLE HAND # 1 – East is the Dealer

NORTH

Spades – A J 5 3

Hearts- Q 10

Diamonds – K 10

Clubs- A Q 10 8 3

WEST

Spades- K 10 7 6 2

Hearts – 7 4 2

Diamonds- A 5 2

Clubs- 7 4

EAST

Spades- Q 9 4

Hearts- A 5

Diamonds – Q J 9 7

Clubs- J 9 5 2

SOUTH

Spades- 8

Hearts- K J 9 8 6 3

Diamonds- 8 6 4 3

Clubs – K 6

SAMPLE HAND # 2 – South is the Dealer

NORTH

Spades- Q J

Hearts- 7

Diamonds- 7 5 4 2

Clubs- A K 7 5 4 2

WEST

Spades- K 10 8 4

Hearts- K J 9 3

Diamonds – J 9 8

Clubs – 8 3

EAST

Spades- 9 5 3 2

Hearts – Q 6 4

Diamonds – Q 10 6

Clubs- J 10 9

SOUTH

Spades – A 7 6

Hearts- A 10 8 5 2

Diamonds- A K 3

Clubs – Q 6

