

## An Important Card Combination

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At the recent Scottsdale Regional, one declarer got this card combination right, one got it wrong, and our team lost the match (Bracket 1 Swiss Teams) because of it. Knowing how to play these cards might help you win a match someday soon!

Your right-hand opponent (RHO) has overcalled 1S. You and your partner get to 3NT, and find that you can develop enough tricks, as long as you can avoid losing more than two spade tricks.

Lead: 9 of spades

Dummy	KT5
You	Q73

Which card do you play from dummy's KT5?

From the auction and lead, we believe RHO started with five or six spades to the AJ8. He has almost all of the outstanding high cards, but LHO may have an entry.

If you play the five, RHO ducks, and you must win the Queen. Now when LHO gains the lead, he'll lead his remaining spade and you'll be sunk, losing at least five tricks and the match.

If instead you play the Ten, RHO covers with the Jack and again, you must win the Queen, losing the contract when LHO gets back in. (Whether you play the 5 or Ten, if you **don't** win the first trick, RHO will simply continue the suit (say, Ace and another to draw your last spades) and set you when he gets in)

The winning play here is to play the King! What can RHO do now?

1. If he wins the Ace, he can't continue with either the Spade Jack or Eight, as that would give you, declarer, two spade tricks, and the timing you need to come to nine tricks.
2. If he shifts to a different suit, he'll either finesse himself (my apologies for not remembering the complete hands!) or take out his partner's entry prematurely, allowing declarer to come to at least nine tricks.

"But wait!", you might say, "What about 'second hand low'?" That's a guideline, something like "eight ever, nine never" or "lead fourth best from your longest and strongest". That is, you have to apply your brain, not just follow maxims or general rules, when you play bridge. In some cases, like this one, you need to analyze the auction and the spot cards to determine which card to play.

I hope you'll make the right play next time the hand calls for second hand **high!**