

2nd Player Low? Not when entries are at stake

Here's a suit that a cheeky declarer might hope to run

	North	
East	♠Q86	West
Declarer		Dummy
♠54		♠AJT92
	South	
	♠K73	

Declarer leads the 4 and North plays low. Declarer tries the Jack from dummy, which loses to South's King. When next in hand, Declarer leads the 5, North plays low, and Dummy plays the Ten, which wins. Now the Ace fells North's queen and declarer runs two more tricks in the suit.

What could the defenders have done? North could have played the Queen at the first trick to great effect. If declarer wins dummy's ace, there will be no entry to dummy on the second round of the suit. If declarer ducks the Queen, the suit cannot be run next time as South's King is guarded.

Let's try another:

	North	
East	♠KT5	West
Declarer		Dummy
♠74		♠AJ9632
	South	
	♠Q8	

Against listless defenders, declarer leads the 4. North plays low and dummy's 9 forces the Queen from South. On the next round of the suit, the 7 is led, North plays the Ten and dummy's Jack wins. The suit is now ready to run and dummy has the lead. What if North plays the King on the first round?

Declarer is less comfortable - if the ace wins this trick, there will be no entry in this suit to run it. If the King is ducked in dummy, the next round will prove a difficult decision for Declarer - will they really pick North for precisely KT5, playing the ace next? Unlikely.

Sometimes hopping up in second chair can streamline the transport for your own side, rather than cramp declarer's plans in the suit being played:

4

♠ AQJ2
 ♥ A8
 ♦ KQ74
 ♣ 984
 ♠ K103
 ♥ QJ9763
 ♦ J8
 ♣ K7
 ♠ 9875
 ♥ 105
 ♦ 109632
 ♣ A5
 ♠ 64
 ♥ K42
 ♦ A5
 ♣ QJ10632

Dealer: West
 Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
2 ♥	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

 Opening Lead: 10 ♥

Declarer plays low from dummy at trick one and wins the ace in hand. A low club comes next and East must rise with the ace. If East plays low, West wins the king and will sensibly lead another heart. This will consume East's last heart and leave room for a violent post-mortem when declarer wraps up 11 tricks. It is East who must win the first club, preserving West's club entry until the hearts are ready to run.
 2nd Player Low: Break this rule at notrumps when you have only one card left in partner's long suit - "hop and spend!"

Sometimes rising in second chair is simply a matter of protecting your tricks:

2

♠ K1074
 ♥ KJ83
 ♦ K3
 ♣ QJ3
 ♠ A2
 ♥ Q974
 ♦ 7654
 ♣ 865
 ♠ J86
 ♥ A2
 ♦ J98
 ♣ AK1094
 ♠ Q953
 ♥ 1065
 ♦ AQ102
 ♣ 72

Dealer: East
 N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1 ♣	Pass
1 ♥	Pass	1 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

 Opening Lead: 3 ♠

Declarer ducks the spade lead in dummy and North wins with the king, returning the 4 to dummy's ace. A small club is led off dummy...
 Dummy is now "entryless" - in other words, this is the last time dummy will lead on this hand. North's club honours could go up in smoke if she doesn't "split" them now - declarer will play the C10 and that will be that. North can afford to split them here as there are no more entries to dummy, declarer cannot finesse again in clubs.
 2nd Player Low:
 Break this rule to "split" touching honours when the hand on your right is short on entries.

"2nd Player Low" is one of the more reliable rules of cardplay. I'd hate you to think that you should break it routinely. But if an opportunity to stifle declarer's plans presents itself, defender's should rarely pass up the chance.