

LARS & KNUT BLAKSET

# Play Better Bridge

*All About Declarer Play:  
Part 2*

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# Foreword

Dear bridge player:

I have literally lost count of the number of times I have witnessed two otherwise agreeable bridge partners exchange icy and dishonest dialogues such as the one below. I made this one up for the occasion; but it is nevertheless very authentic and I am very confident, that within a few seconds you will be nodding your head in agreement.

“3NT down two, do you agree?” East, a strong player with a big ego, is addressing a shame-faced declarer, a much weaker player who has just butchered a lay-down contract in the most spectacular fashion; first by blocking a critical suit and then by missing an obvious endplay of East. The poor man, his discomfort visible to all, confirms with a nod. The silence surrounding the table is palpable, but then after a few awkward seconds, dummy finally breaks the silence.

“Nice try, partner”, he lies; hoping that neither his tone of voice nor his facial expression betray the competing emotions of anger, shock and disbelief, he is feeling inside. The declarer does not reply right away. He is fingering the bridgemate trying to look busy, very well aware that dummy’s “nice try” is a flagrant lie meant to boost his moral.

But he is not aware of the real issue at hand, which is the undeniable fact that he went down in 3NT, for the simple reason that he is a bad card player. And he is a bad card player because he has shown little or no interest in studying the many card-playing techniques that you need to know if you want to become a winning player. Instead; almost his entire focus has been on bidding. And this he has in common with a majority of bridge players. Most

experts recognize the truth in this statement. Many club players alas do not. They might be good bidders but as long as they show minimum interest in becoming better card players, they will keep on losing winnable contracts. This is how the postmortem ended, declarer is finally about to confront dummy: Thanks, partner! What an excellent contract; your fit-bid after my support double was a stroke of genius, just bad luck we ran into such an unfortunate lie of the cards.”

Knowing that his nice partner will not react to this monumental lie, declarer passes the bridgemate to an impatient East, who is unable to hide his eagerness to approve the result, and just as unable to suppress a completely unwarranted reply to declarer’s comments about the Contract: “Unfortunate lie of the cards...? Come on, that contract was a slam-dunk. First you blocked the spades, then you failed to endplay me in hearts...!”

East is shaking his head in disbelief, when he leaves the table. His behavior is of course totally unacceptable; he should have his mouth washed in soap as well as suffer some disciplinary actions, but that shouldn’t keep us all from acknowledging a simple fact of life, a fact made abundantly clear by East’s rude remarks.

It is true that bidding is the single most important element in bridge, but it is just as true, that ending up in the right contract does not help a lot, if you do not know how to play the cards properly! And this is why a book solely dedicated to ‘how to play the cards’, is a gift to bridge players, who have a genuine interest in becoming better card players.

I enjoyed reading it, and you know what? I even learned a thing or two ☺.

Dennis Bilde

Ballebo, Denmark

ACBL Player of the year 2018

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# Introduction

Hundreds of truly great and inspiring bridge books have been published over the last 60-70 years. It was a couple of excellent books that made the two of us aware of the very existence of this beautiful card game more than 40 years ago. It actually happened by accident. Knut, at that time a 16-year old passionate chess player, had gone to the local library hoping to find chess literature about the 'Ruy Lopez' opening. He was out of luck, but next to the section with chess books, there was a much smaller, almost minuscule number of books about a card game named 'Bridge'. Knut got curious, never having heard about this weird-sounding card game, and grabbed the book closest to his hands. Little did he know that this very mundane act was to define the rest of his life. The English title of the book in his hand was "Contract Bridge Complete", written by an author by the name of Charles H. Goren. He opened the book and started reading and kept on reading. Standing mesmerized in the library, oblivious to his surroundings, Knut kept on reading until a kind librarian many hours later informed him that the library was about to close for the day.

"I still vividly recall that day at the library. It was my first encounter with bridge, and i was instantly hooked. My early love for chess was a thing of the past, the future belonged to bridge", knut remember hastily grabbing one other book on his way out. "It was a danish book by the ingenious name of "bridge", written by svend novrup. I have to admit, that none of the two books found their way back to the library. And lars...? Well, he got at least as passionate about the game as i, and within a few months we had scores of books."

So, no doubt about it. Bridge books have through the years in so many different ways had a huge and tangible impact on bridge players; and very often even the game itself. It is, however, our

firm belief that there exists what only can be described as an imbalance in the available bridge literature. The fact of the matter is that quite a substantial number of published bridge books today either narrowly have their focus on some of the many aspects of bidding, while a vast majority of the rest are too advanced for the average player, and therefore have zero to little appeal for the normal club player. Bridge books are de facto dedicated to the less than five percent of players, who like to spend big chunks of their spare time studying the intricacies of their beloved hobby. This leaves the 95 percent who prioritize differently in a void. While it is true that most club players enjoy the lessons offered by their teacher in conjunction with the weekly play, and also true that a select few will read a bridge book now and again, we know, from our club players at the blakset bridge centre (2000+), that they for years have yearned for a non-expert book solely focused on one topic: *‘how to play the cards’*.

Believe it or not, such a book didn’t exist. Now it does, and we have called it: **“play better bridge - *all about declarer play*”**

It is divided into two volumes. We have striven to write them in such a way, that they can be used by you for the rest of your bridge playing life. Think of them as your personal encyclopedia of how best to declare your bridge contracts. We started from the very beginning, explaining the most basic elements of the game for the absolute beginner. Gradually the content gets harder and more advanced, and at the end even experienced tournament players will find this book useful.

We guarantee that you will be a much improved bridge player, no matter your current skill level, if you study the content of this book thoroughly.

Lars Blakset & Knut Blakset  
October 2025  
Copenhagen

# Chapter 1

## Golden Rules

### Rules of Thumb

In this Chapter we take a look into some good rules of thumb, which will help you as Declarer. Some of the rules have already been discussed in other chapters, but it will only do you good to have some of the techniques repeated.

#### A. Play Low in 2<sup>nd</sup> Hand (suit combination after the lead)

When a small card is led to the left of declarer it will typically be correct to ask for a small card from dummy. The purpose is to let the lead run to your hand in order to win the trick as cheaply as possible – or to force third hand to sacrifice an honour. Compared to playing a suit yourself it will in most cases be to your advantage that the defenders open the suit for you. This is the equivalent of the rule in defence “low in second hand”, but here we take the perspective of declarer. This is why we might call this section “suit combinations after the lead”.

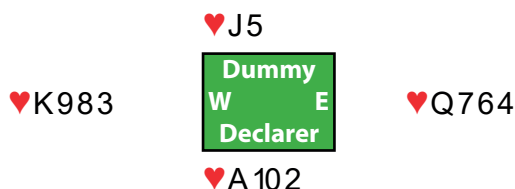
Some examples follow. We presuppose that West leads a small card.

|    |                               |    |                               |    |                               |
|----|-------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 1) | ♠J64                          | 2) | ♠J5                           | 3) | ♠Q62                          |
|    | <div>Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |    | <div>Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |    | <div>Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |
|    | ♠Q72                          |    | ♠A102                         |    | ♠A103                         |

**Ex. 1)** After playing the four from dummy one of two things will happen: Either you get a trick with the queen at trick one, or East has to play a high honour in which case you are sure to get a trick later, since you still have both the jack and the queen.

If the idea of playing the jack from dummy should pop into your head you will most likely get zero tricks. East wins with the king or the ace and plays back through your hand, so your queen is finessed. Note that it is a big help for you to get the suit played by the opponents. If you have to start the suit yourself, your chances of getting a trick are not great.

**Ex. 2)** You play the five from dummy and expect to see an honour from East. You take the ace and the 10 and the jack combined ensure a second trick. If East does not produce an honour you get a cheap trick with the 10. Again it is an advantage that the suit is led by the opponents. If you must play the suit yourself you would need some luck to get two tricks. A typical distribution:



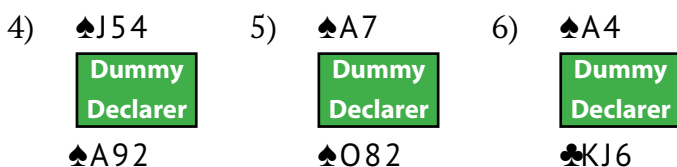
Left on your own you can try to lead the jack from dummy. Unfortunately it will fail, if East knows the basic rules of defence and plays honour on honour covering the jack with his queen. You must take the ace and West has two tricks with his K9 behind your 10.

**Ex. 3)** If you consider playing the queen you will only get one trick in the suit if East has the king and West has the jack. By playing low you will either win the trick cheaply with the 10 or force East to play an honour.

There might be special reasons that make it important for you to play the queen in order to win the first trick in dummy, but that is a completely different story, where you look at the full hand.



***To play low from 2<sup>nd</sup> hand forces 3<sup>rd</sup> hand to play high to prevent you winning cheaply in hand.***



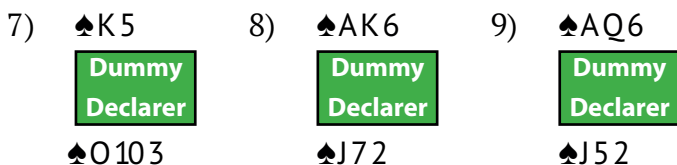
**Ex. 4)** Your chances of getting a trick with the jack are microscopic if you must start the suit. When West leads it you will have a fair chance for two tricks by paying low. What do you hope the lead is from? The whole suit:



East has to put up the king to prevent you scoring a trick with the nine. Thereafter the jack's position behind the queen will produce a second trick for you. Especially in trump contracts it is obvious to play West for K10 or Q10, because he would normally lead the king from KQ. In notrump contracts it is not as obvious since West would normally lead low from KQxx(x). Still you play with the odds by playing low: The chance for either K10 or Q10 at the head of the suit are bigger than specifically KQ.

**Ex. 5)** By playing low you are sure to win a trick with the queen. Either now or later.

**Ex. 6)** Not the hardest task. You thank West for the lead and let it run to your tenace.



**Ex. 7)** Another example of a free finesse – this time of the jack.



***To play low in 2<sup>nd</sup> hand often gives you a free finesse, that you wouldn't or couldn't take yourself.***

**Ex. 8)** By playing low hoping for a lead from the queen you might get a trick with the jack that you couldn't have made yourself. Even with the jack doubleton or singleton in the hand you might choose – also in trump contracts – to let the lead run to get an extra trick. You should take a good look at the lead. Does it look like an invitation from an honour (small card) or more likely top of nothing (high card)?

**Ex. 9)** If the lead is from the king you will win the first trick with your jack and can later finesse the queen. Three tricks. If you must play the suit yourself your only real chance is to play to the queen and then take the ace. You only succeed with Kx or singleton K in West. If you play the jack, West will cover with the king.

|     |                               |     |                               |     |                               |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| 10) | ♠A65                          | 11) | ♠A65                          | 12) | ♠A74                          |
|     | <div>Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |     | <div>Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |     | <div>Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |
|     | ♠J102                         |     | ♠J93                          |     | ♠QJ9                          |

**Ex. 10)** By playing low you will always get two tricks with divided honours. Couldn't you then always get two tricks? No, you are missing the nine.

|       |                                       |      |
|-------|---------------------------------------|------|
|       | ♥A65                                  |      |
| ♥Q943 | <div>Dummy<br/>W E<br/>Declarer</div> | ♥K87 |
|       | ♥J102                                 |      |

You try the jack from your hand, but West smartly plays low. East wins with the king and West has a tenace with Q9 behind your 10.

The situation is much better for you when West has opened the suit. East wins his king at trick one, but since you haven't used any of your important cards yet, with J10 in your hand you now hold a finessing position against the queen. Two tricks for you!

**Ex. 11)** In a no-trump contract the lead could be from KQ in which case you get the first trick with your jack. More often your purpose in playing low from dummy is "locking" the suit for the defence, if East has the 10 together with an honour.

|       |                                       |       |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-------|
|       | ♥A65                                  |       |
| ♥Q842 | <div>Dummy<br/>W E<br/>Declarer</div> | ♥K107 |
|       | ♥J93                                  |       |

East takes his king, but the suit is now locked for the defence. In practical play where East cannot see your cards, he will return the 10. You cover with the jack and get two tricks.

**Ex. 12)** If the lead is from the king, you always get three tricks by playing low regardless of the position of the 10. Either you win the first trick with the nine, or East puts in this card at trick one making your sequence in hand solid. If you must play the suit yourself you cannot – against correct defence – get more than two tricks unless East has 10x or the singleton 10 (play the queen followed by the jack). You might also play West for the doubleton king. Play the queen and if West covers you take the ace and finesse the nine. If West plays low from Kx, you can guess to play the nine next dropping the king. By the way, against inexperienced players West might cover with the king from Kxx(x). This gives you a finesse against the 10.

|                           |                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 13) ♠Q54                  | 14) ♠AJ2                  | 15) ♠J754                 |
| <b>Dummy<br/>Declarer</b> | <b>Dummy<br/>Declarer</b> | <b>Dummy<br/>Declarer</b> |
| ♠A92                      | ♠K93                      | ♠AK3                      |

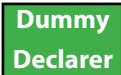
**Ex. 13)** Especially in notrump is it tempting to try the queen at trick one, since West has often led from the king. But is it necessary to do it now? West might also have led from J10xx(x). That is why it is best to play low and let the lead run home to A92. Should East turn up with the 10 or the jack you win the ace and will get a trick with the queen later if West has the king.

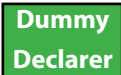
**Ex. 14)** Same point. There is no rush to try the jack at trick one. The lead could be from the 10, and East could have the queen. If East plays the 10 you win the king and can later take the finesse against the queen.

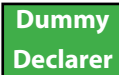
**Ex. 15)** When you have a 4-card suit in dummy it is not necessary to play the jack on the lead. Play low and see if the queen pops up from East. West could have led from 10xxx/109xx. If East plays the eight, nine or ten at trick one, you can also try to lead up to the jack after having taken the AK. Note: There can easily be the argument that you need to get three tricks now without losing the lead. In that case it would be correct to play the jack at once.



***To play low in second hand often gives you two chances.***

16) ♠Q92  
  
 ♠A83

17) ♠K7  
  
 ♠J63

18) ♠K7  
  
 ♠93

**Ex. 16)** Looks a lot like 13) but now you also have the eight. This means that you do not have to play only for the king with West. Instead, you can play West from either the 10 or the jack – or both. Play low and watch East’s card. If the king appears, you are happy. More likely you will see the 10 or the jack. Our recommendation is to win the ace and finesse the nine next. Even if this line is going to lose, when East holds J10, you might easily be saved by a “nervous” West hurrying to take a trick with the king. Defence is tough!

**Ex. 17)** If you rise with the king you end up with zero tricks when East has the ace and West has the queen. Playing low guarantees one trick. Especially in trump contracts is it highly unlikely that West has underled the ace, but he could easily have led from the queen.

**Ex. 18)** A little joke to finish these examples? Your chances of getting a trick seem microscopic if West does not have the ace, so playing no-trumps you should definitely try the king as your only chance. In a trump contract you can imagine that playing low could ruin the defenders lines of communication. We will show you a complete hand with this theme:

Dealer: East

Vulnerability: All

|         |                                                                                     |           |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|         | ♠ 10876                                                                             |           |
|         | ♥ K7                                                                                |           |
|         | ♦ K5                                                                                |           |
|         | ♣ AKQ85                                                                             |           |
| ♠ J4    |                                                                                     | ♠ 93      |
| ♥ Q62   |                                                                                     | ♥ AJ10854 |
| ♦ 76432 |                                                                                     | ♦ AQ10    |
| ♥ 763   |                                                                                     | ♣ 94      |
|         |  |           |
|         | ♠ AKQ52                                                                             |           |
|         | ♥ 93                                                                                |           |
|         | ♦ J98                                                                               |           |
|         | ♣ J102                                                                              |           |

| West | North | East     | South |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| -    | -     | 1♥       | 1♠    |
| Pass | 4♠    | All Pass |       |

Contract: 4♠ by South.  
Lead: ♥2

After the bidding and the lead you can be 100% sure that East has the ♥A. Therefore there is no reason to ask for the king at trick one. You might be so lucky that East does not dare to finesse the 10, but that is a faint hope. The essential point is that your duck at trick one keeps West off lead. If you play the king, East takes his ace and plays another heart. The sight of the good club suit in dummy should make it a piece of cake for West to take the ♥Q and defeat your contract with a diamond lead through the king.

The effect of playing low is evident. East can finesse the 10 and cash the ace but he still holds the lead. East can take his ♦A or he can return a passive trump but the result is the same: 10 tricks for you. This example take us to the next section:

### ***Do Not Play Low In Second Hand.***

No rules are without exceptions. If you play on autopilot and always ask for a small card from dummy, you will miss a lot of tricks. For the sake of completeness we have to show you some examples, where you should not play low. Sorry, but that's the way it is with bridge. You cannot only rely on rules – you have to think yourself!

- |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 19) ♠Q6                                                                                                                                      | 20) ♠Q6                                                                                                                                      | 21) ♠Q7                                                                                                                                      |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Dummy<br/>Declarer</div> |
| ♠A82                                                                                                                                         | ♠K53                                                                                                                                         | ♠AJ5                                                                                                                                         |

**Ex. 19)** Rise with the queen! If you play low, East will produce the nine, 10 or jack. Remember, that West would have led the jack from J109, so it is a 0% move to play low. The only chance to get a trick with the queen is that West has led from the king.

**Ex. 20)** The situation is not as clear in this setting. In a no-trump contract it will typically be correct to play the queen. If the lead is from the ace you still have the K5 stopper if West gains the lead. If East gets the lead (the dangerous hand) it does not matter. In a

trump contract, where West would rarely underlead the ace, you probably do best by playing low. East will often from e.g. A10xx take his ace instead of finessing the 10, since he cannot see if partner has led from the king.

**Ex. 21)** Rise with the queen! If West has the king you keep your fork with AJ in your hand. If West regains the lead he cannot lead the suit without giving you an extra trick with the jack. If East has the king he can finesse dummy's queen with a middle card. You get your jack, but next time the queen is slaughtered by the king.

If you also had the nine in your hand, AJ9, you should always play low in order to get three tricks whenever West has the 10 and East the king.

|                 |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 22) ♠J5         | 23) ♠Q102       | 24) ♠QJ7        |
| <b>Dummy</b>    | <b>Dummy</b>    | <b>Dummy</b>    |
| <b>Declarer</b> | <b>Declarer</b> | <b>Declarer</b> |
| ♠A92            | ♠A54            | ♠962            |

**Ex. 22)** Your only chance is to try the jack. Especially in a notrump contract you can hope for a lead from KQ. Note the difference compared to example 4, where you had a 3-card suit in dummy. When the jack is doubleton you gain nothing from East playing an honour at trick one, since the other honour will beat the jack.

**Ex. 23)** If you play low, East can put in a middle card that costs the ace. Now you have to guess the next time, whether West has the jack or the king. Avoid guessing. Use one of the high cards from dummy at trick one. This will guarantee two tricks no matter which honour is in West's possession. If it is important for you not to lose a fast trick in the suit, you still have to guess whether to put in the 10 (the lead is from the jack) or the queen (the lead is from the king).

**Ex. 24)** Play one of the honours! If you play low, you put all your money on West holding the 10 (50%). By using the jack at trick one (and later the queen) you get a trick whenever West has either the king or the ace (75%). This argument is most valid in notrump contracts, where West easily can have underled the ace.

“Finally, a comprehensive book about declarer play for the non-expert.”  
Zia Mahmood

If you want to become a complete player you absolutely must acquire the techniques you need to know to master the complexities of cardplay. More than that, you need to appreciate the importance of all 13 cards, not only the aces, kings and queens. This book, the second of two volumes, introduces advanced topics and completes your voyage of discovery like no other devoted to declarer play. Utilizing hundreds of examples of individual suits and complete deals, every technique is explained and amplified in a way that is easy to understand.

“Buy it before your opponents do.” — Sabine Auken

“I’ve always thought that declaring a hand is the most fun part of bridge, and reading this book reinforces that feeling. Dig in, and become a better declarer!” — Boye Brogeland

“A gem of a book for players that want to improve.” — Dennis Bilde



**KNUT BLAKSET** (b.1960) and his younger brother, **LARS BLAKSET** (b.1961), are Danish bridge royalty. The prodigious brothers have been a dominating factor in Danish bridge for more than four decades and are universally recognized to be among the best bridge players ever to come out of Denmark.

With a combined total of almost 100 national titles to their names, the Blaksets have represented Denmark on the international scene since their late teens. Lars has authored several bestselling Danish bridge books, with Knut as co-author on some of them. This is their first book for Master Point Press.

