

HILO

	<u>Score</u>		<u>North 2</u>	
Your team	355	<u>West 3</u>		<u>East 3</u>
Pones	324		<u>South 4</u>	
			♠ 4 6 9 K	
			♥ 4 9	
			♦ 2 8 A	
			♣ 3 7 8 K	

On the first trick of this 12 bid hand, West leads the Ace of Hearts... your partner plays the 3... and East plays the 2.

What card should you play?

If you play the 4 of Hearts you are making a mistake.

MISTAKE 34

On high bid hands, if you do not use the high/low convention when you start with only two cards in a suit, you are failing to communicate extremely important information to your partner, needlessly either getting set or missing setting opportunities, and you and your pard are losing more Spades games than you should.

Conventions

A convention is more than a get-together where Ralph Kramden would go with his Raccoon Lodge buddies in order to throw water balloons out of hotel windows. When it comes to partner card games, it is a well understood and agreed upon method of playing that communicates critical information between partners.

The most powerful of these conventions in the game of Spades is the *high/low* approach to playing two card holdings on high bid hands. In the high/low convention, if your partner sees you discard a higher card on the first round of a suit than you do on the second round of that suit, that tells him that you have no cards remaining in the suit.

Normally, on a high bid (setting) hand, you play your discards from lowest

to highest in order to maximize the potential usefulness of your higher cards. When using the high/low convention and playing your cards in the reverse order, your partner understands that to be a signal that you are now void in that suit.

Communicating such a void to your partner will often help him identify an approach for playing his hand that will help your team to either make its bid or set the opponents.

Specifically, he may choose to lead that suit back to you so that you can cash your trump. If he also started with only two cards in that suit, he may pass up the opportunity to trump the suit in order to short himself in another suit and/or hopefully let you use a less valuable trump than he has in his hand in order to win the trick.

Further, by telling your partner what suit you are void in, you generally are also telling him what suits you still have cards in. All of this information flow gives your team a tremendous advantage over the opponents in the play of the hand.

In the above example, by discarding the nine of Hearts under West's Ace, and then playing the four of Hearts on the next round of the suit, as long as you and your partner have agreed to use the high/low convention, he will know that you have no more Hearts left in your hand.

The only time not to use the high/low approach to indicate a doubleton in a suit is if your high card is high enough that it could reasonably be expected to win a trick.

Specifically, if your high card is the King, never discard that card first unless your other card is the Queen of the suit. If your high card is the Queen, you generally should not discard it first.

If East leads a low card on the first round of the suit, it is possible that West will lose the King to your partner's Ace, and your Queen will be promoted to the master card in the suit. Further, if East leads a low card on the second round of the suit and your partner has the King and at least one other card in the suit, your Queen will most likely be able to win the trick. Even when you do not play high/low when your high card is the Queen, your partner will normally understand that you are either void in, or have control of the

suit when you play the Queen under the King on the second round.

In general, however, whenever the high card in your doubleton is the Jack or lower, you should play it first, followed by the lower card the next time the suit is led. The benefit from saying *hilo* to your partner in this way will almost always outweigh the limited value that your Jack or lower card would have on the second round of the suit.

The high/low convention is one of the most powerful tools of the successful Spades player, and once you start using it you will quickly agree that it is even more fun than water balloons!