

HOLD UP PLAY

It is vital to understand that it is not always necessary to try to win a trick; sometimes, it is critical to NOT win a trick.

When playing notrump contracts, the defense will usually lead their longest suit; they are trying to establish the extra cards in their suit as winners for later in the hand. We often cannot prevent this, however, we often CAN prevent an entry to that hand so that they can be cashed.

This is the essence of hold-up play. We allow the defenders to win the first one or two tricks in the suit they have led in order to prevent them from winning the 4th and 5th cards in that suit later in the hand. We must be patient and allow the communications between the defenders' hands to be cut.

Let's ponder on this concept for a moment. Suppose you arrive in 3 NT after the auction 1 NT-3 NT and your LHO leads the ♥ 3. As per usual with this partner, the dummy has the ♥ 54 hearts and you have ♥ A76. Obviously, this is a great lead for the opponents. If you win the ace right away, when the opponents regain the lead, they will be able to cash 3 or 4 more hearts tricks, possibly scuttling your contract. This is because both opponents are certain to have more hearts. Now, suppose we let them win the first two heart tricks and we win the 3rd. If the hearts were originally 4-4, there is probably nothing that can be done to prevent them from eventually getting one more heart trick, but you still may make 3 NT. However, if they were originally 5-3, you can prevent the opening leader from scoring the last two heart tricks if you can keep the opening leader from winning a trick later. If you have a missing queen in a side suit, you can finesse against this player. If they have the queen, perfect, you get all the tricks in that suit. If they don't, the player with the queen cannot reconnect with partner to score those long heart tricks. This is the kind of technique which earns the admiration of your partners.

Generally, (but not always), we are trying to prevent a defender who started with 5 cards in a suit from getting back on lead. If that is the case, you can use the Rule of 7 to decide how long to hold up if you have only 1 stopper. The formula:

$$(\# \text{ rounds to hold up}) = 7 - (\# \text{ cards between declarer and dummy})$$

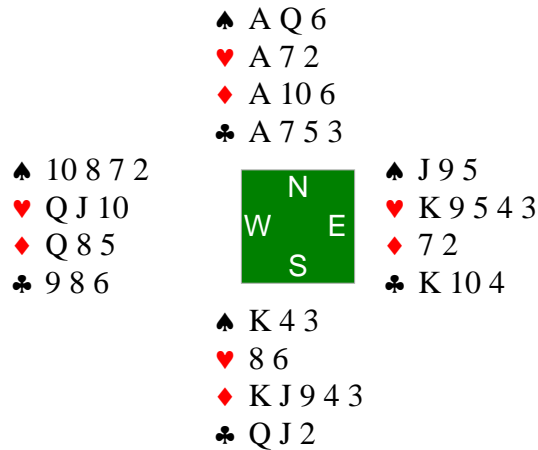
In the example above, the declarer and dummy have 5 cards, so we should hold up twice if we can. $(7 - 5) = 2$

Sometimes, you will even hold up if you have two stoppers. With AKx opposite two small, it is often right to let the opponents have the first trick in order to slow them down later.

You can even hold up when you don't have the ace (or ace-king). With Kxx, if the suit is led to your RHO who wins the ace and returns the suit, the formula above still applies. If you have AQx, and the opening lead goes to your RHO's king, it may be right to duck even this! The ace and queen are worth two tricks in the suit; they don't have to be the first two tricks.

By studying this technique, and by watching what happens when you hold up (or fail to hold up), you take another step towards understanding how the pros bring in all those great results. It isn't magic; anyone can learn these techniques, even your partner.

Board 1
 North Deals
 None Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

Auction Commentary: Opener opens the longer minor. Responder bids up the line 1 ♦. Opener rebids 2 NT to show 18/19 HCP balanced, and responder adds the two hands together and gets to game.

Opening Lead: 4 ♥ Fourth best from an unbid major with length.

Play of the Hand: It's NT, so let's count sure winners: 3 ♠s, and 1 ♥, and 2 ♦ and just 1 ♣. Two more tricks are needed to fulfill the contract, and that ♦ suit offers the best chance. It is mandatory to HOLD UP playing the the A♥ until the 3rd round.

Use the Rule of 7 when you only have the Ace as a stopper in the suit.
 Add the ♥s from the NS hands together, and subtract from 7.
 7-5=2 ... you need to duck the A♥ twice.

This is done to sever communication between the two opponents.

Then play the A♦ and then 10♦ and DUCK it! As long as the RHO gets the lead they cannot get back to partner. This is a safety play.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

	♠ Q 8 5 4		
	♥ K 10		
	♦ 10 8 7 3		
	♣ A 5 3		
♠ K J 6		♠ A 10 7	
♥ 7 5 4		♥ A Q 6	
♦ A Q 9		♦ K J 5	
♣ Q J 8 4		♣ 10 9 7 2	
	♠ 9 3 2		
	♥ J 9 8 3 2		
	♦ 6 4 2		
	♣ K 6		



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Pass	3 NT	All pass

Auction Commentary: 3 NT by responder guarantees 13-15 HCP and a stopper in all the unbid suits. This bid usually promises a 4-card ♣ suit. With a 4-card ♦ suit we would bid slowly to hear the opener's rebid, as often we want the stronger hand to play and the weaker hand as dummy.

Opening Lead: 3 ♥ As there was no major suit bid we lead our longest major.

Play of the hand: Counting sure winners: 2 ♠s, plus 2 ♥s, and 3 ♦ = 7 tricks. Declarer sees that forcing the AK♣ out, promotion in the ♣ suit will gain enough tricks to make the hand. Although you have 2 stoppers in the ♥ suit, you must duck the first trick to sever the communication between the two defenders' hands, in case the ♥s are 5/2.

If you win the first trick and defender plays the A♣ and gets out the last ♥ trick, the K♣ entry will defeat the hand because they can cash all the ♥s. HOLD UP the first trick the RHO will not have anymore ♥s to get to partner.

- ** Use the Rule of 7 when you only have the Ace as a stopper in the suit. Add the ♥s from the NS hands together, and subtract from 7. 7-6=1 ... you need to duck the A♥ (hold up) **just once** to cut the communication between the defenders' hands.

Board 7
 South Deals
 None Vul

	♠ K 7 4		
	♥ A 8 6		
	♦ K 9 5		
	♣ J 9 6 4		
♠ 10 2	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ J 9 8 5	
♥ K 9 7 3 2		♥ 10 5	
♦ Q 4 2		♦ 10 8 6 3	
♣ K 3 2		♣ A 7 5	
	♠ A Q 6 3		
	♥ Q J 4		
	♦ A J 7		
	♣ Q 10 8		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

Auction Commentary: 3 NT by responder guarantees 13-15 HCP and a stopper in all the unbid suits. This bid usually promises a 4-card ♣ suit. With a 4-card ♦ suit we would bid slowly to hear the opener's rebid, as often we want the stronger hand to play and the weaker hand as dummy.

Opening Lead: 3♥ 4th from the longest unbid major. When the opponents do not bid Stayman it is advisable to lead a major not a minor.

Play of the hand: Count sure winners: 3 ♠s, plus 2 ♥s, and 2 ♦s... It looks like promotion in the ♣ suit is where we can definitely get 2 tricks. This is **without relying on the spade suit to divide 3/3, or trying a finesse of the Q♦**. The suit promotion is a guarantee so don't bother with the "exercise" of trying the finesse or the division of ♠s.

As the RHO played the 10♥, now LHO was marked with the K♥. Therefore, it is essential to HOLD UP and duck the 10♥. Thereafter win the A♥ if LHO covers the Q♥. And declarer can now go about setting up the ♣ suit. If you must lose a trick, often in NT it is advisable to lose a it early, to sever communications.

When the RHO wins the A♣ there are no more ♥s to set up for partner. Should the LHO win the ♣ and force out the ♥s, there is no entry to enjoy them!