

## Hold-Up Plays

by Ed Rawlinson

The primary purpose of hold-up plays is to control transportation between the opponents' hands. You can utilize a hold-up play as declarer or as a defender. The following hands illustrate typical situations.

1.	♠-xx ♥-Qxx ♦-KQJ10 ♣-xxxx  ♠-Axx ♥-AKx ♦-xxxx ♣-AKx
South is declarer at 3NT. West leads the ♠K. Plan the play.	
Skill Level: Basic	

You have 6 immediate tricks (1 spade, 3 hearts, & 2 clubs). You have 3 potential diamond tricks after you knock out the ♦A. Your problem is that when you knock out the ♦A, the opponents may cash enough spades to set you. If the outstanding spades (there are 8) are divided 4-4, they will only get 1 diamond and 3 spades. But if the spades are divided unevenly, you might lose more spades. If the same opponent has the ♦A and the long spades, there is nothing you can do. However, if the ♦A is with the short spades, you can prevent the opponents from cashing all their winners. If you hold up taking your ♠A until the third round, then you will make your game when the opponent with the ♦A started with only 3 spades.
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The full hand:  ♠-xx ♥-Qsx ♦-KQJ10 ♣-xxxx  ♠-KQJxx ♥-Jx ♦-xxx ♣-Qxx  ♠-Axx ♥-AKx ♦-xxxx ♣-AKx	♠-xxx ♥-xxxxx ♦-Ax ♣-Jxx
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There is a “rule of thumb” about hold-up plays. It is “the Rule of 7”. Count the cards you and dummy hold in the suit led and subtract from 7. The result is the number of times you should hold up. Sometimes it is not possible to follow the rule. For example, suppose the NS spades were Ax for North and xxx for South. Sometimes it may be possible but inadvisable. Examples of exceptions are shown in later hands. The Rule of 7 applies only to NT contracts, not suit contracts.
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<p>2.</p> <p>♠-KQJx ♥-xxx ♦-AKJx ♣-xx</p> <p>♠-A10xx ♥-Kxx ♦-Qxx ♣-Axx</p> <p>South is playing 4♠. West leads the ♣K, and East plays the ♣J. Plan the play.</p> <p>Skill Level: Intermediate</p>	<p>You have 9 top winners (4 spades, 4 diamonds, and 1 club). You might win a heart if the ♥A is inside. You could also play to ruff a club in dummy. However, you should also count potential losers. You have 1 club loser and 2 or 3 heart losers, depending on the location of the ♥A. You might plan to win the ♣A, pull trumps, run diamonds (throwing a heart from your hand) and lead toward the ♥K. This works if spades are 3-2. However, if they are 4-1 and you pull all of them, you won't have any trumps left to stop hearts if the ♥A is offside. You also wouldn't be able to ruff a club in dummy. If you win the ♣A and lead a club back, intending to ruff the club before pulling trumps, East will win and lead a heart through you (3 more losers). The solution is to "duck" the first club (hold up your ace). You can now win the second club, ruff a club, pull trumps, &amp; cash diamonds. Holding up the ♣A prevented East from getting in to lead hearts through you.</p>
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The full hand:

	♠-KQJx	
	♥-xxx	
	♦-AKJx	
	♣-xx	
♠-x		♠-xxxx
♥-AQxxx		♥-J109x
♦-xxx		♦-xx
♣-KQxx		♣-J109x
	♠-A10xx	
	♥-Kxx	
	♦-Qxx	
	♣-Axx	

<p>3.</p> <p>♠-x ♥-xx ♦-AKxxxx ♣-Kxxx</p> <p>♠-KQJ109xx ♥-Axx ♦-Qx ♣-Q</p> <p>South plays 4♠. West leads the ♥K. Plan the play.</p> <p>Skill Level: Advanced</p>	<p>Interesting hand! You have 6 spade winners, 1 heart, and 3 diamonds. You might win 3 more diamonds if diamonds are 3-2 and the opponents let you cash them (unlikely). You have 1 loser in spades and clubs and 1 or 2 potential heart losers. The problem is you can't cash diamond winners until you pull their trumps. However, if you win the ♥A and lead the ♠K, they will cash two hearts and the ♣A. The solution is to hold up the ♥A until the second round. Now you can trump your third heart in dummy. Best line is to lead a club &amp; eventually pull trumps.</p>
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<p>4.</p> <p>♠-xxx ♥-xx ♦-KQJ10x ♣-xxx</p> <p>♠-xxx ♥-xxx ♦-Axx ♣-KQJx</p> <p>South plays 4♥. You are East. Partner leads the ♠K. Declarer wins this with the ace and wins three rounds of hearts. Partner follows to two hearts, then discards the ♣2. Declarer leads the ♦3, and partner plays the ♦2. Plan your defense.</p> <p>Skill Level: Basic (Defense)</p>	<p>Declarer has shown 6 hearts and the ♠A. He also presumably has the ♣A, since partner discouraged clubs with the ♣2 discard. Your job defensively is to prevent declarer from getting any more diamond tricks than he is entitled to. When partner plays the ♦2, he is showing an odd number (3), so declarer has 2. Duck the first diamond, win the second, shutting declarer out of the dummy. If partner plays high-low on the first two diamonds, showing 2 or 4, then declarer started with 1 or 3. If you believe he started with 3, then you duck the first two rounds. If you believe he started with 1, you win the first round.</p>
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<p>5.</p> <p>♠-xxx ♥-xx ♦-AQJ10x ♣-xxx</p> <p>♠-QJ109 ♥-xx ♦-Kxx ♣-QJ109</p> <p>South opened 2NT (showing 20-21 points) and is playing 3NT. Partner leads the ♥Q. Declarer wins with the ace and leads the ♦4, partner playing the ♦2. Plan your defense.</p> <p>Skill Level: Intermediate</p>	<p>Declarer's hand is obvious. He must have the AK in spades, hearts, and clubs for his 21 points. He needs 3 diamonds to make his contract. This hand is just like hand #4, except that you must now hold up winning your ♦K (rather than the ace on the prior board). If you win the first round, he will be able to lead a second diamond to dummy and make 4 diamond tricks. If you duck the first round and he finesses the second round, he will only get 1 diamond trick and be down 2. Even if he plays the ♦A on the second trick, he's still down 1. Duck smoothly on the first round so he will think partner has the ♦K.</p>
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The preceding hands illustrate the **primary** purpose of hold-up plays: controlling the transportation between the opponents' hands. The following hand illustrates a less common use of the hold-up play.

<p>6.</p> <p>♠-xxxx ♥-xx ♦-AQxxx ♣-xx</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">♠-Axx ♥-J109x ♦-xx ♣-J109x</p> <p>South, known for overbidding, is playing 4♠. Partner leads the ♦J. Declarer wins the ♦K. South leads the ♠K. Plan your defense. Skill Level: Advanced</p>	<p>The problem is what to lead (hearts or clubs) after you win the ♠A. If you win the first round of spades, then you might as well flip a coin—either suit could be right. However, a better play is to duck. When declarer leads the ♠Q, partner now signals encouragement with the ♥8. A heart lead sets the contract, while a club lead would let declarer make his contract. The hold-up play gives partner a chance to signal his preference.</p>
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The full hand:

<p>♠-x ♥-AQ8xx ♦-J109 ♣-Axxx</p>	<p>♠-xxxx ♥-xx ♦-AQxxx ♣-xx</p> <p>♠-Axx ♥-J109x ♦-xx ♣-J109x</p> <p>♠-KQJ10x ♥-Kx ♦-Kxx ♣-KQx</p>
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<p>7.</p> <p>♠-6543 ♥-AJ ♦-AK ♣-KQJ104</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">♠-A8 ♥-KQ2 ♦-9542 ♣-7532</p> <p>South is declarer at 3NT. West leads the ♠7. Plan the play. Skill level: Basic</p>	<p>This is very similar to hand #1. You have 1 spade, 3 hearts, and 2 diamonds for a total of 6 tricks. You have 4 potential club tricks after the Ace is knocked out. However, the risk is that the opponents will cash enough spades to set you when they get in with the ♣A. Your only hope is to hope that the opponent with the ♣A has no more than 2 spades. Thus, you should duck the first spade. After winning the ♠A, knock out the ♣A and hope.</p>
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<p>8.</p> <p>♠-9642 ♥-AJ ♦-AK ♣-KQJ104</p> <p>♠-A3 ♥-KQ2 ♦-9542 ♣-7532</p> <p>South is declarer at 3NT. West leads the ♠7. Declarer plays the ♠2 and East plays the ♠K. Plan the play.</p> <p>Skill level: Advanced This hand was printed in “Bridge with Bergen” in the ACBL “Bulletin”.</p>	<p>If the spades are 4-3, your contract is safe (they can only cash 3 spades and the ♣A). If spades are 5-2, you could duck one round and hope that the opponent with 5 spades does not have the ♣A. However, there is a difference between this hand and the prior one, and that is the spade spots, especially the ♠9 in dummy. If the opponents are using “fourth-best” leads, you use the “Rule of 11” and find that East started with 2 spades higher than the 7. East’s remaining spade could be the Q, J, 10 or 8. In reality, it can’t be the 8, because West would have led the Q from QJ10. Thus East must have the Q, J, or 10. Suppose that West had started with 5 spades and the ♣A and suppose you win the first spade. When West wins the ♣A, he will be unable to run the spades because they are “blocked”. East-West do not have the transportation to cash their good spades. However, if you duck the first spade, now when West gets in with the ♣A, he can cash his 3 remaining spades. So on this hand, it correct to win the first spade. The lesson is to include clues from the opening lead in the planning of the play of the hand.</p>
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<p>9.</p> <p>♠-A42 ♥-43 ♦-QJ10432 ♣-K32</p> <p>♠-Q3 ♥-A652    Contract: 3N by South ♦-A65    OL: ♥7; East plays ♥Q ♣-A54</p> <p>Skill level: Advanced</p>	<p>This is an example of when NOT to hold up. It appears that this is a fourth-best lead, so if you win the first trick and set up diamonds, the most you would lose would be 3 hearts and a diamond. However, if you duck and East shifts to the ♠J (West has Kxx), you will go down if the ♦K is offside.</p>
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<p>10.   ♠-743             ♥-J73             ♦-AJ87   N E S W             ♣-A84       2♥ 2N P                      3N All pass</p> <p>     ♠-KQ6             ♥-KQ8       OL: ♠5; East plays ♠J             ♦-Q1043             ♣-KQ5</p> <p>Skill level: Advanced</p>	<p>West clearly has 4 or 5 spades headed by the A10. South has 1 spade winner, 2 heart winners, 3 club winners, and 3 or 4 diamond winners. If South wins the first spade, then when East gets in, a spade return will allow West to run the suit. If spades are 4-3, there is nothing South can do to avoid the loss of three spades (South can duck the first spade, but West will duck the second spade to maintain transportation). However, if spades are 5-2, the suit will be blocked if South ducks the first spade and East holds the ♥A (highly likely).</p>
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Ducking with KQx against NT contracts is a common expert play, when the circumstances warrant such action. Inexperienced players frequently win the first trick hoping to win a second trick later, even when a little thought would show that to be a completely unrealistic hope. However, there are many hands where it would be wrong to duck with KQx. Suppose you had the same NS hands shown above with a different auction: N E S W

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           1♠
    P   P X P
    2♦ P 2N P
    3N All pass      OL: J♠

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Now it is safe for South to win the first spade. West must hold the ♠A, ♥A, and ♦K to open the bidding. East will never win a trick. If South ducked the first spade, West would simply cash the ♠A, lead a third spade, and wait to get it with the ♥A to cash the remaining spades.