

THE HOLD-UP PLAY

In the play of a NT hand, both sides are trying to establish tricks, usually through their long suits. The defender's have the benefit of the opening lead (a dubious benefit at best when I am on lead), the opening shot in trying establish their best suit. When the opening leader hits the right suit, the contract is in jeopardy. Fortunately, Declarer has a counter to the defenders' established long suit--the Hold-Up Play.

The Hold-Up Play is the refusal to win a trick in order to maintain control of the suit which an opponent has led until such time as control can be relinquished with comparative safety.

Remember: In most NT contracts you rarely have enough tricks off the top. You must establish more tricks by promotion, length, and/or finessing. Establishing means that you might have to let the opponents in the lead. The Hold-Up Play cuts the communication between the defenders' hands so you have the time to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Cutting the communication--means that you eliminate from one of the opponents' hands the suit which has been led, so that if the devoiced opponent subsequently obtains the lead, he will be unable to play back his partner's suit.

1. The Hold-Up Play is most often discussed from the viewpoint of declarer and in NoTrump contracts.
2. Hold-Up Plays are used to exhaust and isolate **one** opponent.
 - If you know that one opponent has a singleton, take the ace at once.
 - If you know that one opponent has a doubleton, take the ace on the second round.
 - If you cannot be certain how many cards one opponent has, Hold-Up until one opponent shows out or as long as you can afford to.
3. Use the Hold-Up Play even with two winners if you have two cards to knock out.
4. Hold-Up Plays with the Ace have maximum flexibility. Hold-Up Plays with a King depend on the placement of the opponents' cards.
5. Do **NOT** Hold-Up when:
 - a. the leader's partner can never get in the lead
 - b. a shift to another suit would be more dangerous
 - c. when you can count your tricks at rubber bridge or IMPs

Classic Hold-Up Play Example

	Qxx		Contract: 3NT	Lead: Fourth Best Club
	Kxx			
xxx	AJ10xx	Jxxx	Club lead and South employs the HUP. East	
Qxxx	xx	Jxx	continues, and once again South HUP. On the	
x		Kxx	third round, South has to take his ace. South tries a	
KJxxx	AKx	Qxx	diamond finesse which loses. Whatever East	
	Axx		returns, South can win and take the rest of the	
	Q9xx		tricks.	
	Axx			

1. If South had taken the first or the second round of clubs, East would have had a club left to return when he was in with the diamond king.
2. The HUP would work whenever West has longer clubs than East, 8-1, 7-2, or 5-3.
3. If clubs had been divided 4-4, East would still have a club left but East-West could only cash three clubs plus the King of Diamonds.
4. If the Diamond King had been with West, the HUP would not have been necessary, but it couldn't hurt!

The Bottom Line: in the above example, assuming West led from his longest suit, the HUP represents a form of comprehensive insurance. It takes care of everything--a bad club split as well as a key card (King of Diamonds) being adversely located.

NOW WHAT???

Once you have isolated the opponent with the long suit, he becomes the **dangerous opponent**. The strategy for the rest of the hand revolves around keeping the dangerous opponent from regaining the lead.

Strategies for keeping the Dangerous Opponent out of the lead:

1. If given a choice of finesses, do NOT take one where the D.O. might win
2. Take a two-way finesse into the safe opponent
3. Make a safety play to guard against a bad break in a key suit
4. Pray