

## Hold Up & Avoidance Plays

### Definitions:

- ◆ **Hold up play:** Not winning a trick (that you can win) for strategic reasons
- ◆ **Avoidance play:** Keeping your dangerous opponent off lead
- ◆ **Dangerous opponent:** One who can hurt you by, for example:
  - ▶ Running a long suit
  - ▶ Leading through an unprotected K
  - ▶ Leading a card that his/her partner can ruff

**Note:** Lecture just covers offense. It is also useful on defense – a lecture for another time.

### Why do it:

- ◆ Drain one opponent of a danger suit (cut communications)
- ◆ Keep dangerous opponent off lead (avoidance play)
- ◆ Convince opponent to make a lead that gives up a trick (Bath Coup)
- ◆ Save a convenient entry to ruff in short hand (suit contract only)
- ◆ Rectify the count for a squeeze (not covered in this lesson)

### When NOT to do it:

- ◆ **When it's futile**
  - ▶ When you have plentiful tricks off the top (& it risks contract or offers no gain)
  - ▶ When you have no choice but to finesse into the danger hand
  - ▶ When they have so many cards in suit led that hold-up is futile
  - ▶ When you are SURE the suit splits 4-4
- ◆ **When it's dangerous**
  - ▶ When they can switch to a more dangerous suit
  - ▶ When it can cost you your 2nd stopper
  - ▶ When you can lose your only stopper
  - ▶ When you risk a ruff (trump contract)

## Basic Hold-up (draining an opponent of danger suit in NT)

### With the Ace

3N; ♥5 led:

♠ Axx  
♥ xx  
♦ AQJ10x  
♣ xxx

- ♦ *Winners off top: 7*
- ♦ *Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamond finesse*
- ♦ *Hold up till 3<sup>rd</sup> round. Assuming lead was from length, either East is out of hearts or they were 4-4. In either case your contract is cold regardless of the location of ♦K.*

♠ KQx  
♥ Axx  
♦ xxx  
♣ AKxx

### With the King

3N; ♥Q led; ♥A won by East, hearts continued:

♠ Axx  
♥ xx  
♦ KQJ10x  
♣ xxx

- ♦ *Winners off top: 6 (including ♥K after trick 1)*
- ♦ *Only source for 3 more tricks: Diamonds*
- ♦ *Hold up till 3<sup>rd</sup> round & hope East has ♦A or hearts were 4-4.*

♠ KQx  
♥ Kxx  
♦ xxx  
♣ AKxx

- **Question:** What would South do if East doesn't play ♥A? Think about this on defense if you hold ♥Axx & ♦A.

### With the KQx – it depends on who can get lead

3N; ♥5 led & East plays ♥J:

#### Case 1:

♠ Axxx  
♥ xxx  
♦ Axxx  
♣ KQ

#### Case 2:

♠ Axxx  
♥ xxx  
♦ QJ109  
♣ KQ

- ♦ *Winners off top: assuming 1 heart, 7*
- ♦ *Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamond finesse*
- ♦ **Case 1:** Hold up on 1<sup>st</sup> round. Assuming lead was from length, either East is out of hearts after continuing at trick 2 or they were 4-3. In either case your contract is cold regardless of the location of the ♦K
- ♦ **Case 2:** No point in holding up since you will finesse into West who cannot hurt you in hearts.
- **Note:** This general principle also applies with:
  - o AJx when K or Q is played by East
  - o KJx when Q is played by East

♠ Kxx  
♥ KQx  
♦ QJ109  
♣ Axx

♠ Kxx  
♥ KQx  
♦ Axxx  
♣ Axx

**With 2 Stoppers (only when you have to lose 2 tricks to set up enough for contract):**

**3N; ♥J led & East plays ♥K:**

- ♠ Axx      ♦ *Winners off top: 7* after ♥K is played at trick 1
  - ♥ xxx      ♦ *Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamonds*
  - ♦ J109x    ♦ Hold up 1 round. Assuming lead was from length, either East is out of hearts when he wins a diamond or they were 4-3. If West has both club honors and 5 hearts, it's just not your day.
  - ♣ Axx
  
  - ♠ KQx
  - ♥ AQx
  - ♦ Qxxx
  - ♣ Kxx
- 

## Hold-up & Avoidance Play

**3N - Case 1: ♥5 led; Case 2: ♥9 led**

- ♠ Axx      ♦ *Winners off top: 7*
- ♥ xx      ♦ *Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamond finesse*
- ♦ KJ1098   ♦ **Case 1:** Hold up till 3<sup>rd</sup> round. Assuming lead was from length, either East is out of hearts or they were 4-4. Finesse into East (A then low to J).
- ♣ Kxx
  
- ♠ Kxx      ♦ **Case 2:** Hold up till 3<sup>rd</sup> round. Assuming lead was from shortness, either West is out of hearts or they were 4-4. Go to dummy with A♠ or K♣ then finesse into West by leading the ♦J.
- ♥ A10x
- ♦ Axx
- ♣ Axxx      ► Don't go to dummy with ♦K to protect against ♦Qxxx in East.

**Case 3:**

**3N; ♥5 led, East plays ♥Q**

- ♠ Qxx      ♦ *Winners off top: 7*
  - ♥ xx      ♦ *Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamond suit*
  - ♦ AJ109x   ♦ Hold up till 3<sup>rd</sup> round. Assuming lead was from length, you need to protect against West having 5 or more hearts.
  - ♣ Kxx
  - ♦ **DO NOT** play for ♦Q drop. You cannot let West in. Finesse into E (♦K then low to ♦J).
    - This statement is absolute for a team game. For pairs, you might choose to risk the contract based on the state of your game (i.e. if you think you need a good board).
    - Odds of 2-2 vs. 3-1 after K cashed & West follows to small diamond: ~ 52% to 48% or slightly better.
  - ♠ AJx
  - ♥ Axx
  - ♦ Kxxx
  - ♣ AQx
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### Case 4:

3N; ♥5 led

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| ♠ Qxx   | ♦ <i>Winners off top: 8</i>  |
| ♥ xx    | ♦ <i>Only source for another trick: Diamond suit</i>   |
| ♦ xxxx  | ♦ Hold up till 3rd round. Assume, based on the spots played, that you can tell that if anyone has 5 hearts, it is West.  |
| ♣ KJ10x | ♦ You <b>MUST</b> play to the K♦ (hoping East has the A) since you cannot let West in. This isn't a guess about the diamond position – you can't win if West has the A♦. |
| ♠ AKx   |  |
| ♥ Axx   |  |
| ♦ KJx   |  |
| ♣ AQxx  |  |
- 

## Hold-up in Hope of Continuation (Bath Coup)

**Definition:** A hold-up when defender leads the K of a suit and either:

- Declarer has AJx in hand and no useful cards in dummy
- Declarer has Jxx in hand and Axx in dummy

**Purpose:** Induce leader to continue suit so you can get 2 tricks when only one is truly available

**Note:** Good defensive signaling usually makes this futile, but sometimes defender doesn't have the cards for a clear signal so leader is on a guess about whether to continue or not. Note that declarer should false-card appropriately based on the defensive signals to try to confuse the issue.

3N; ♥K led:

### Case 1:

♠ Axx  
♥ xxx  
♦ Kxxx  
♣ KQx

♠ Kxx  
♥ AJxx  
♦ Axx  
♣ Axx

### Case 2:

♠ Axx  
♥ Jxx  
♦ Kxxx  
♣ KQx

♠ Kxx  
♥ Axxx  
♦ Axx  
♣ Axx

- ♦ *Winners off top: 8*
- ♦ *Only source for 1 more trick: J hearts or 4<sup>th</sup> diamond*
- ♦ **Case 1:** Hold up on 1<sup>st</sup> trick, false-carding, & hope for continuation for your 9<sup>th</sup> trick. If hearts are not continued, you still have the A♥ so you can lose a diamond to try to set up 4<sup>th</sup> one.
- ♦ **Case 2: DO NOT HOLD UP.** This is NOT a Bath Coup situation. With the ♥K lead you have a 2<sup>nd</sup> stopper (& 9<sup>th</sup> trick) with dummy's ♥J as long as you win the 1<sup>st</sup> trick (unless lead was Kx).

■ **NOTE:** It is also not a Bath Coup situation if you have the 10 in either hand.

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## Hold-up in Suit Contract

### Case1: *Keep danger hand off lead*

4♥; ♠3 led

♠ xx  
♥ Q10xx  
♦ Kxx  
♣ AJ9x

♠ Axx  
♥ AKJxx  
♦ xx  
♣ Q10x

- ♦ Losers: 3 (1♠ +1♦ +1♣) – can't afford 2<sup>nd</sup> diamond loser
- ♦ Let East hold 1<sup>st</sup> trick so that it impossible for West to win a trick and switch to a potentially fatal diamond.
  - ▶ Note that the club finesse is into the safe hand so the spade is West's only potential entry.

### Case2: *Preserve convenient entry for ruff*

4♥; ♠ K led

♠ Axx  
♥ J10xxx  
♦ xx  
♣ xxx

♠ Jx  
♥ KQx  
♦ AJxx  
♣ AKQx

- ♦ Losers: 3 (1♠ +1♥ +1♦) – can't afford 2<sup>nd</sup> spade loser
- ♦ Must ruff a spade in short-trump hand (declarer)
  - ▶ If you win the ♠A, you have to lose a spade & get back to dummy to ruff the spade. There is no convenient way to do this.
  - ▶ If you hold up, the ♠A provides the dummy entry that you need.

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## When NOT to Hold Up

### Case 1: *You have enough tricks without holding up*

3N; ♥K led

♠ Kxx  
♥ xxx  
♦ KQxxx  
♣ KQ

♠ xxx  
♥ AJxx  
♦ AJx  
♣ Axx

- ♦ *Winners off top: 9*
- ♦ **DO NOT HOLD UP** looking for an overtrick. If West finds a spade switch (not holding the A), you have just gone down in a cold contract.

**Case 2: There is a more dangerous switch available**

**3N; ♥J led; First trick: J-Q-K-A**

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|---------|--|
| ♠ xxx   | ♦ <i>Winners off top: 7</i>  |
| ♥ Qx    | ♦ <i>Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamond finesse</i>  |
| ♦ Q10x  | ♦ <b>DO NOT HOLD UP.</b> There is a really good chance they'll find a spade switch and collect a lot of hearts & spades. |
| ♣ AQxxx | ▶ You need the ♦K on-side anyway, so just assume it's on-side & don't hold up.   |
| ♠ Qxx   |  |
| ♥ Axx   |  |
| ♦ AJx   |  |
| ♣ KJxx  |  |

**Case 3: You have a 2<sup>nd</sup> stopper only if you DON'T hold up**

**3N; ♥5 led**

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| ♠ xxx    | ♦ <i>Winners off top: 6</i>  |
| ♥ Ax     | ♦ <i>Only source for 3 more tricks: Diamonds</i>   |
| ♦ QJ109x | ♦ Only danger is 4 heart losers as well as AD, so protect against 5-2 split.   |
| ♣ Kxx    | ♦ East <b>MUST</b> have a heart honor (West didn't underlead KQJ) so assume East has Kx, Qx or Jx  |
| ♠ AKx    | ▶ If you hold up A, East will win & return the suit forcing the A with no honors with no honors wasted by the defense. Now if West has the ♦A, you are down. |
| ♥ 109xx  | ▶ If you win the A, you always have 2 stoppers:  |
| ♦ Kxx    | • If East unblocks the honor, your 10 will always win a trick.   |
| ♣ AQx    | • If East doesn't unblock, the defense can't run the suit because it is blocked  |

**Case 4: Only choice is to finesse into danger hand**

**3N; ♥5 led**

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| ♠ xxxx     | ♦- <i>Winners off top: 6</i>   |
| ♥ Axx      | ♦ <i>Only source for 3 more tricks: Diamond finesse.</i>   |
| ♦ 9x       | ♦ Unless you think the lead was a doubleton (highly unlikely), don't bother holding up. You have to finesse into West – either it works or it doesn't. |
| ♣ AKxx     | ▶ If the finesse works, and you didn't hold up, you made 12 tricks.  |
| ♠ AKx      | ▶ If the finesse works, and you held up 2 rounds, you only made 11 tricks.   |
| ♥ xx       | ▶ If the finesse doesn't work, you're down unless hearts were 4-4.   |
| ♦ AQJ10xxx |  |
| ♣ xx       |  |

### Case 5: You can lose your only stopper

3N; ♥5 led;  
East plays Q

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| ♠ Axx    | ♦ <i>Winners off top: 6</i>  |
| ♥ xx     | ♦ <i>Only source for 3 more tricks: Diamonds</i>   |
| ♦ AQJ10x | ♦ <i>If you hold up, a heart will be returned &amp; you'll lose as many hearts as West has and may well go down even when the ♦K is on-side.</i> |
| ♣ xxx    |  |
|          |  |
| ♠ KQx    |  |
| ♥ Kxx    |  |
| ♦ xxx    |  |
| ♣ AKxx   |  |

### Case 6: They have so many cards that hold up is futile

3N; ♥J led; First trick: J-Q-K-A

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|---------|--|
| ♠ Kxx   | ♦ <i>Winners off top: 7</i>  |
| ♥ x     | ♦ <i>Only source for 2 more tricks: Diamonds (note that you can't afford to lose ♠A)</i> |
| ♦ Q10x  | ♦ <i>No point point in holding up – no way to drain East of hearts</i>                   |
| ♣ AQxxx | ♦ <i>Either the diamond finesse works or you go down</i>                                 |
|         |  |
| ♠ Qxx   |  |
| ♥ Ax    |  |
| ♦ AJxx  |  |
| ♣ KJxx  |  |

### Case 7: They've clearly led 4<sup>th</sup> best & there is no gain to hold up

3N; ♥2 led

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|----------|--|
| ♠ Ax     | ♦ <i>Winners off top: 5; After losing ♣A: 8</i>  |
| ♥ xx     | ♦ <i>You need both club tricks &amp; diamond tricks to make contract. Since that's 2 potential losers you might normally consider holding up on the first round of hearts.</i> |
| ♦ AJ10xx | ♦ <i>The 2 lead is almost always 4<sup>th</sup> best (though check their card)</i>   |
| ♣ Q10xx  | ▶ <i>If you hold up and the diamond finesse is on, you'll make 11 tricks</i>   |
|          |  |
| ♠ Kxx    | ▶ <i>If you don't hold up and the diamond finesse is on, you'll make 12 tricks</i>   |
| ♥ AKx    | ▶ <i>If the diamond finesse is off, you'll make 9 tricks whether you hold up or not assuming hearts split 4-4.</i>   |
| ♦ Q9x    |  |
| ♣ KJxx   |  |

**Case 8: You risk a ruff**

**2♠; ♥K led**

♠ KQxx

♥ xxx

♦ Ax

♣ Kxxx

♠ J10xx

♥ AJx

♦ xx

♣ QJ10x

♦ *Losers:* 5 (1♠ +2♥s+1♦+1♣□)

♦ If you hold-up on the first trick, hoping for a continuation and an overtrick you risk a club switch (& a duck of the ♣A to maintain defensive communication)

▶ Now when you lose the A♠, you also lose a club ruff – and you go down in a cold contract