

HOLD-UP PLAYS IN NO TRUMP (& IN SUITS)

The purpose of a hold-up play is to exhaust one defender of cards in a particular suit. This is especially true at no trump. Once one opponent no longer has cards in that suit, that opponent becomes the “safe” hand and the partner is the “danger” hand. Your challenge is to develop your tricks **without** allowing the dangerous hand to gain the lead. **The general “rule” in NT is to hold up twice if you and dummy have only 5 cards in the suit; hold up once if you and dummy have 6 cards in the suit and don’t bother to hold up if you and dummy have 7 cards in the suit.**

If for example, you hold Axx in spades and dummy has xx, and a 4th-best spade is led, you will generally hold up twice (taking your Ace on the third round). You hope that one opponent (presumably right-hand opponent) has no more spades by then. **Do not hold up when there is a more dangerous suit to which your opponent might switch.** Thus, if you hold Axx in spades and xxx in dummy and a 4th-best spade is led, but you have Ax of hearts opposite 10xx, do NOT hold-up in spades. You can **not** afford to have a heart switch!

When there is a dangerous hand, you must tailor your play to that fact. You will try to take finesses only into the “safe” hand. If you have two possible suits to develop, you will choose to attack the one that offers the least chance that the danger hand might get the lead.

When your holding is AJx in a suit, you can consider that **one and one-half stoppers**. How you play the suit depends on which opponent you think is likely to gain the lead next. If left-hand opponent leads the suit and right-hand opponent plays a high honor (king or queen), you should take your Ace immediately **IF AND ONLY IF** you believe that left-hand opponent is likely to gain the lead next. (Your Jx is still a stopper if left-hand opponent has the lead.) If, however, you think that right-hand is most likely to gain the lead next, you should hold-up for two rounds (ducking twice) and take the 3rd round of the suit—hoping that right-hand will be exhausted of the suit (no more) by then.

When, as Declarer, **you must knock out two enemy stoppers, it is often right to hold-up in the opponents’ suit (once) even when you have two stoppers.** (That way, if one opponent has only a doubleton in the dangerous suit, and if the enemy stoppers are split between the two hands, you will be fine.) For example, you hold AKx Q10xx Kxx Axx opposite xx J9x AQxx Kxxx and the opponents lead a spade. Hold-up (duck) the first spade. Take the second spade. Then, knock out the Ace and King of hearts. If left-hand opponent has both the Ace and King of hearts, AND 5 spades, you are a dead duck. If, however, left-hand opponents has 5 spades and only ONE of the top hearts, left-hand can take the first heart and clear spades, but right-hand opponent will have no more spades to return when s/he gets in with the 2nd high heart. And, if right-hand opponent takes the first high heart, s/he has no more spades to clear the suit (IF you held-up the first round). Of course, if spades are 4-4, you don’t care who takes the first heart or when.

You can also utilize hold-up plays in suit contracts. The most common case is when you have Axx opposite xx in dummy and the opponents lead the suit. Often, it is right to hold-up (duck the first trick). When you take the 2nd trick, you may guarantee that you get the ruff in dummy that you need (especially if your hand has no quick entries once that Ace is gone), or you may preserve that ruff in dummy for a later entry (after you establish a long suit in dummy, for example).

When dummy is short of entries and has a long suit, **defenders should hold-up their stopper(s)** as long as needed to “kill” the long suit (ensure that Declarer is not able to set up the suit AND get back to it) That is why it is vital for defenders to give each other **count** in such situations!