LESSON 20b: STUDENT NOTES

Hold Up Play

The hold-up is utilized most often when you are playing notrump; the purpose usually being to disrupt communications between the defenders by exhausting one defender of his partner's suit.

Imagine you are in 3NT and the opponents have led their club suit in which West happens to hold ♣KQJT9 and East ♣752.

You have ♣A86 opposite ♣43. If you take your ace on the first round, the defenders have immediately established 4 club tricks for their side. Unless you now have 9 top tricks – not so common – you may have to lose, say, an ace to the opponents in a different suit to establish enough winners for your contract.

What will happen then? If West wins, he will simply cash his club winners and you are one down. If East wins, he will play a small club to West's winners and again you will be one down. Gloom.

But what if you hold up your ace until the third round of clubs? And what if in order to develop 9 tricks you lose a trick to East? What can East do?

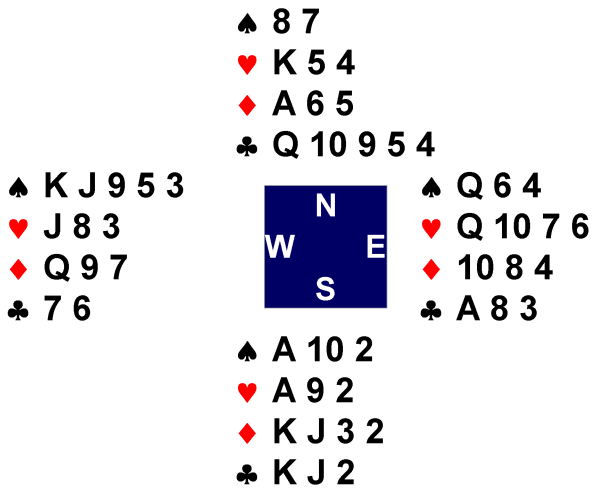
Well, he certainly can't lead a club to West's hand because you have **severed the line of communication between the defenders in the critical suit.**

Of course, if West wins the trick, you will go down as before, but then there is nothing you could have done about it. Your job as declarer is to cater for situations you can do something about. Holding up improved your chances from 0% to 50%.

How many times should you hold up? The general rule, sometimes called the **Rule of Seven**, is: take away from 7 the number of cards you and dummy together hold, 5 in the last example. 7 – 5 = 2. And so you should hold up twice.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

Consider the following deal. You are South, declarer in 3NT on ♠5 lead to East's ♠Q.



You can count only 5 top tricks, but the good news is that you can easily establish 4 more in clubs by driving out the ace.

So what's the catch?

If West started with 5 spades – you can't tell for sure from the lead - he will have 4 winners if he ever gains the lead. Is there any way to prevent this?

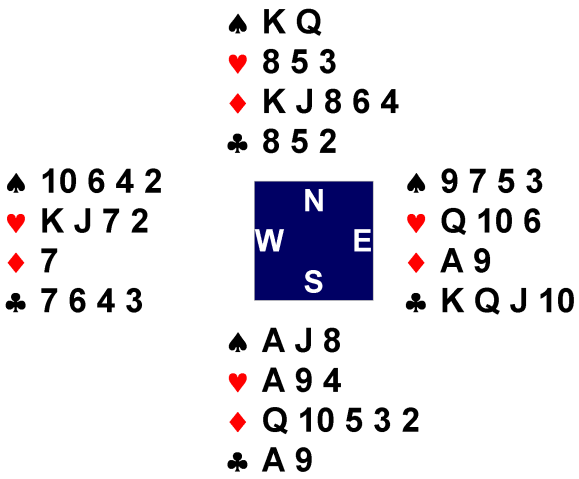
If East holds ♣A, you will be safe if you can run East out of spades by holding up your ace till the third round before playing on clubs.

And if West holds ♣A, you'll go down and move on to the next board, knowing you gave it your best shot.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

Of course, you don't hold up if you can see 9 tricks and there is a chance that the defenders might switch to a suit in which you are even weaker and defeat you! Don't hold up merely because you can – only when it gives you an extra chance of making your contract.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣



This time West leads ♥2 against your 3NT to East's Q. You have 5 top tricks and can easily establish 4 more in diamonds by driving out the ace?

Is this another case for holding up before playing ♦s?

Swap seats for a moment and imagine instead you're East. Say your ♥Q holds the trick. Defenders count their tricks just like declarer - you need 4 more tricks to defeat the contract. And you can see that if you switch to ♣K, you will have 3 club tricks when you win your ♦A. Partner's ♥2 cannot be from a 5-card suit – woodenly returning hearts is not the answer.

Now back to you as declarer. You, too, assume West holds no more than 4 hearts. And so it looks as if they can cash only 3 hearts when they win ♦A. No need to hold up. Maybe something unpleasant awaits you elsewhere if you do.

Principles:

- If missing 8 cards, hold up until the third round. If the suit divides 5-3 then one defender will have run out of the suit. If the suit divides 4-4 then you only have three losers anyway
- Just hold up until one hand has run out of the suit. If you know how many cards one defender has (from the bidding or play), then you know exactly how long to hold up
- Do not hold up if you have an even worse suit then the one led

EXTRA EXAMPLES

The Basic Hold-up:

Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♥5 and East plays ♥Q.

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

Winners: 2♠ 1♥ 0♦ 2♣ = 5. Look to promote diamonds

West may hold five ♥s. So after forcing out ♥A, the defence may be able to win 4 ♥ tricks to go along with their ♦A.

So hold-up the ♥A until the third round. Then play ♦s and continue with the ♦ suit until the defense takes the ♦A. If it is East who wins, and they started with only 3 ♥s, they will have none to return to their partner's hand. And if East does happen to have a fourth ♥ it means the ♥ suit was originally 4-4 and you will only lose 3 tricks in the suit.

Holding Up with a King

Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♥Q, East plays ♥A (unblocking) and returns the ♥9.

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

Winners: 2♠ 0♥ 0♦ 3♣ = 5. Look to promote diamonds

Once East takes the ♥A on the first round the situation becomes identical to the first example. You hold up your ♥K until the third round. Then you drive out the ♦A and hope it is East who has it.

Not Holding Up with a King

Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♥5, East plays ♥J

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

Winners: 2♠ 0♥ 1♦ 3♣ = 7

The opening lead guarantees you a ♥ trick and tells you West has ♥A. You should win the first trick as, if you duck, East will return a ♥ and West will take all their ♥ winners. Win the first trick and try the ♦ finesse. If West holds the ♦K you will make the contract.

Holding Up with Two Stoppers:

If you have to establish a suit which is missing two top honours then you may have to hold-up on their suit when you have it double-stopped.

Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♦J, East plays ♦K

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

Winners: 3♠ 2♥ 1♦ 0♣ = 6 lead gives us an extra ♦ trick, need to promote ♣s

The danger is that West may have a 5-card ♦ suit that can be established before you can set up any ♠ tricks.

Suppose you take your ♦A at trick one and play on ♣s. If the two high ♣s are split, East will win the first ♣ & play another ♦, allowing West to establish the suit. When you again play ♣s, West will take their ♣ winner & also take some ♦s.

If you allow East to win the ♦K. They will return the suit & drive out one of your stoppers, but they will use the last remaining ♦ to do so. Now, whenever East takes their ♣ winner they will have no ♦s to help West establish the suit. Since West has only one entry in ♣s they can win it & establish the ♦s, but won't be able to get back in to cash them

Summary

- If short of stoppers in the suit led by the opponents look to hold up unless you have an even worse suit
- If you have two stoppers look to hold up on the first round
- Sometimes you just have to take a chance to make the contract, eg a finesse, even with an unstopped suit
- **Rule of Seven** - take away from 7 the number of cards you and dummy together hold. (However see L Cohen Rule of Thinking)

Suggested Video: Link here (14 mins)

Handviewer: Example of Hold Up (Press NEXT to play the cards) Link here

Bridge-Training Links

Practice these hands online

Hand 1 Hand 2 Hand 3 Hand 4 Hand 5 Hand 6
Hand 7 Hand 8 Hand 9 Hand 10 Hand 11 Hand 12

We thank Tina Zines for use of her material

Quizzes https://forms.gle/QL8VfybDzUnMxRgh9

1) How do you play this suit - West leads ♠K led?

North
♠6 **3**

West
♠**K** Q J 9 2

East
♠10 7 5

You
♠A 8 4

Hold up ♠A until the third round

2) How do you play this suit - ♠5 led with East winning with ♠A & returning ♠10?

North
♠6 **3**

West
♠Q J 7 **5** 2

East
♠**A** 10 9

You
♠K 8 4

Hold up ♠K until the third round. East will not have a ♠ to return if wins a later trick.

3) How do you play this suit - West leads ♠6?

North
♠7 4 **2**

West
♠A J T **6** 3

East
♠**Q** 8

You
♠K 9 5

Don't hold up - win with ♠K. If you duck & East returns a ♠ E/W will take 5 ♠ tricks

4) West leads 4th best & East plays ♠Q.

a) If you need to finesse into the East hand do you win the trick?
b) If you need to finesse into the West hand do you win the trick?

North
♠6 4 2

West
leads ♠**5**

East
♠**Q**

You
♠K J 8

a) Duck in case West is leading from a 5 card ♠ suit. If you win & later East leads a ♠ likely lose 4 ♠ tricks
b) Win with ♠K as the ♠J will be a stopper with West on lead

5) How do you play this suit - West leads ♠K?

North
♠A 5 3
♦K 7 5

West
♠**K** Q J 6 4
♦T 9

East
♠T 9 7
♦A 8 3 2

You
♠8 2
♦Q J 64

Must hold up twice & then win 3rd round. Now when we play on ♦s East wins withe ♦A but has no more ♠s

6) How do you play this suit - West leads ♠Q having open with a Weak Two 2♠ ?

North
♠K 3
♦Q 9 8 4

West
♠**Q** J T 9 8 7
♦A 3

East
♠5 2
♦K 7 5

You
♠A 6 4
♦J T 6 2

Even with 2 ♠ stoppers we need to duck the first trick so that East is unable to play a ♠ when wins with ♦K. If we win first trick East can return a ♠ taking our last stopper while West still has ♦A as an entry.

7) How do you play this suit - West leads ♥K? Contract is 3NT by South

North
♠K 8
♥7 5 2
♦A K 6
♣K J 8 6 3

West
♥**K**

East

You
♠8 6 4
♥A J 6
♦Q J 7
♣A Q 7 4

We must win the first trick. Otherwise, West may switch to a ♠ & we lose 4 or 5 ♠ tricks if East has the ♠A. If we win we have 9 certain tricks to make the contract.

8) How do you play this suit - West leads ♦4 & East wins with ♦A & returns ♦5 ? Contract is 3NT by South

North
♠K 8 6 3
♥7 5 2
♦6 3
♣A Q J T

West
♦**4**

East
♦**A** then ♦**5**

You
♠A Q 7
♥A K 6 4
♦K 9 7
♣8 6 3

We must hold up until the 3rd round. Then if the ♣ finesse fails East will not be able to return a ♦.

9) In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT

DUMMY
♠ 87
♥ K54
♦ A65
♣ QT954

YOU
♠ AT2
♥ A92
♦ KJ32
♣ KJ2

3NT on lead of ♠5 to East's ♠Q.
Top tricks?
How many more needed?
Which of your opponents figures to be the more threatening one, the danger hand?
And so your plan is…?

Top tricks: 1♠ 2♥ 2♦ 0♣ = 5; **How many more needed?** 4
Danger Hand: West as may have 5 ♠s
Plan: Hold up for 2 rounds & then play on ♣s

10) In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT

DUMMY
♠ KQ
♥ 853
♦ KJ864
♣ 852

YOU
♠ AJ8
♥ A94
♦ QT532
♣ A9

3NT on ♥2 lead to East's ♥Q. Top tricks?
How many more needed?
Which of your opponents figures to be the more threatening one, the danger hand?
Your plan?

Top tricks: 3♠ 1♥ 0♦ 1♣ = 5; **How many more needed?** 4
Danger Hand: West as length in ♥
Plan: Win & play on ♦s. Assuming West has led 4th highest then only has 4 ♥s & we can afford to lose 3 ♥ tricks

11) In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT

DUMMY
♠ 952
♥ A
♦ KQJT54
♣ 962

YOU
♠ AK8
♥ K96
♦ 983
♣ KQJT

3NT on the lead of ♥5.
Number of top tricks? Number needed? Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Top tricks: 2♠ 2♥ 0♦ 0♣ = 4; **How many more needed?** 5
Possible Sources: Can make 5 ♦s or 4 ♣s once the respective As are forced out
Danger Hand: West as may have 5+ ♥s
Plan: Win the first trick & play ♦s immediately as we still have a ♥ stopper. When they return a ♥ hold up & hope East only has 3 ♥s. (Good defence should try & hold up ♦A until the 3rd round of ♦s & then there will no entries to the winning ♦s in dummy)