

No Trump Play: The Hold Up, Part I

Dealer South	♠A7		
N/S Vul	♥62		
♠J8	♦KJ3	♠ Q10642	
♥KQJ75	♣K109762	♥ 1093	
♦10874		♦ 965	
♣54	♠K953	♣ A8	
	♥A84		
	♦AQ2	Bidding	<u>S</u> <u>N</u>
	♣QJ3		1NT 3NT
			all pass

Opening lead: ♥K

The basic principal of the hold up play in no trump is to withhold your single stopper in the opening leader's long suit until her partner has played his last card in that suit. That way if you lose the lead to the opening leader's partner, he may not have a card in partner's suit to return to her now established winners.

In the deal above, you must assume West's opening lead is from a 5+ card suit (if opponents' hearts split 4-4 it would make no difference whether you held up or not—the most tricks they could take in the suit would be 3). You have plenty of top winners, but you must drive out the ♣A to establish those winners. Your hope is that by the time you win your ♥A and lead a club, East will have the ♣A and no heart to return to West's established heart winners. You therefore hold your ♥A to the third round, and play high clubs from your hand until East steps up with his ♣A. You win any return and claim the rest of the tricks.

On the other hand, if you take your ♥A on the first or second trick, when you try to set up clubs, East has a heart to lead, and you will be set. Defenders will take 4 hearts and 1 club, for down 1.

Sometimes you will be unlucky, and West will have both the long suit and the outside entry. Give West the ♣A and you will be set no matter how you play the heart suit—you cannot stop West from taking 4 hearts. It doesn't mean you shouldn't be in game in no-trump with only a single stopper in a particular suit. You have more than enough points (27 combined), and much of the time the above strategy will work. If you require assurance of solid stops in all suits, you will miss many makeable no trump games.

The more difficult task is to recognize those hands when you *should not* hold up your stopper. We'll explore three of those situations in this and next week's lesson.

Dealer South
 N/S Vul
 ♠9752
 ♥KQJ76
 ♦64
 ♣J3

♠KJ8
 ♥43
 ♦KJ953
 ♣K62
 ♠AQ106
 ♥A85
 ♦AQ102
 ♣87

♠43
 ♥1092
 ♦87
 ♣AQ10954

Bidding S W N E
 1NT pass 3NT all pass

Opening lead: ♥K

This hand is one where you should definitely *not* hold up the ♥A, for two reasons. The first is that you if you take the ace, you have 10 easy tricks: 4 spades, 1 heart, and 5 diamonds. Remember, if you're assured of a contract, it is often best to play to make it if there is a chance you will go down if you try for overtricks.

The more important reason for taking your ♥A immediately is that a club shift could be devastating (and on the lie of the cards will be). At trick one, East will see that lonely ♣K on the board and play the ♥2, a card that begs West not to continue hearts. It's true that West may misread the signal (from the dummy it's hard to tell which of the other three suits might be in jeopardy, since there are so many unguarded kings), or West may miss the signal altogether and keep playing hearts (defenders' tip: watch partner's signal on your opening lead; partner, don't forget to signal *attitude* on the opening lead, high means you like it, low calls for a switch). I'd like to think if I were West I'd lead the ♣J at trick 2 if South were foolish enough to let me win trick 1, because my doubleton and the board's doubleton should be the best chance of finding East's long suit, but sometimes that will simply be playing the exact card South wanted (switch East's and South's minor suits). That's bridge for you—not many guarantees.

In any event, there's no reason for South to hold up on this hand. Grab the heart ace, cash your pointed suit winners, and breathe a sigh of relief that the opening lead wasn't the ♣J.

Another point to remember—unguarded kings are best *led up to*. If North had been the declarer, no lead can prevent 3NT from making (North's ♣K is absolutely safe in 4th position). There's no good way for that to happen in this hand, playing standard methods, because South will always open 1NT on this holding. See my mini-lesson No Trump Play #1, on "right-siding" the contract.