

Notrump and the Hold-up Play



Last month we learned as declarers to count immediate winners and make a plan before calling for the first card from Dummy. For the first hand this month assume the bidding went 1NT-3NT and the opening lead is the ♥5. Make your plan before reading:

Lead ♥5

♠	AJ3
♥	982
♦	A7
♣	J9653

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠	KQ7
♥	A104
♦	K96
♣	KQ108

You have six tricks off the top (3 spades, 1 heart and 2 diamonds). You can score four tricks in clubs once you drive out the ace. To make the contract you must limit your heart losers to three (because you know you must lose the ♣A). If hearts split 4-3, the contract is

cold because you can only lose three hearts. If hearts are 5-2 or 6-1 you could be in trouble. Does the lead give us a clue to the heart split? Yes (otherwise I wouldn't have asked the question!).

Your opponents are playing standard leads, which implies (not guarantees) that West has four or five hearts. Applying the rule of 11 to the ♥5 lead means Dummy, Declarer and East combined have six hearts higher than the ♥5. (See the sidebar on p. 5 for an explanation of the rule of 11.) Since you and Dummy have four hearts greater than the ♥5, East has two higher and the split can be no worse than 5-2.

To limit the heart losers to three, you must duck the first heart trick. East takes the trick with the ♥Q and plays another heart. The reason to duck is to break communications between East and West.

Assume for the moment that East has the ♣A. If you take the first heart trick and lead clubs to drive out the ace, East will win the trick and shoot back a heart to West. West takes the trick and runs his hearts. If he started with five, your contract is beyond resuscitation—they've won five of the first six tricks.

Holding off one round of hearts before taking your ace brings the



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contract home. If East only started with two hearts, when he wins the ♣A he cannot lead a heart back to partner's good heart tricks. Whatever he leads you can take and run off your winning tricks: ten tricks in the bag.

If East has another heart, then West only started with four. They'll get their other two heart tricks, but after they win their fourth trick, the remainder are yours, making the contract.

What happens if West has the ♣A? If West started with five hearts you are going down. Oh well, so will everyone else no matter how they played the hearts. If he started with four, you still make the contract.

What if West is the one with the short hearts—say he led from a doubleton hoping to help his partner out? The same hold-up play is required to prevent West (if he has the ♣A) from leading his second heart to East's good hearts.

Congratulations, you have just learned the benefits of the hold-up play. On the next page you will find the whole hand.

Notrump and the Hold-Up Play

♠A J 3		♠10 8 6 4 2
♥9 8 2		♥Q 6
♦A 7		♦J 10 8 4 2
♣J 9 6 5 3		♣A
♠9 5	W N E	♠10 8 6 4 2
♥K J 7 5 3	W S	♥Q 6
♦Q 8 5		♦J 10 8 4 2
♣7 4 2		♣A
		♠K Q 7
		♥A 10 4
		♦K 9 6
		♣K Q 10 8

As with any good strategy, you must know when to apply it and when not to. Let's consider another example.

This time after you open 1NT that pesky West overcalls 2♣, alerted as a major and a minor. Your partner bids 3NT in tempo. West lays the same ♥5 on the table, resolving the question about which major he has.

♠A J 3		♠10 8 5 4 2
♥9 8		♥K J 2
♦10 8 5		♦4 2
♣A Q J 6 5		♣9 7 3
Lead ♥5	W N E	♠10 8 5 4 2
	W S	♥K J 2
		♦4 2
		♣9 7 3
		♠K Q 7 6
		♥A 10 4
		♦K 9
		♣K 10 8 2

You count your tricks off the top and use all your fingers including your thumbs (four spades, one heart, no diamonds and five clubs). Given the bid, West probably has five or six hearts, leaving East three or two. Should we perform a hold-up play to cut E-W communications in hearts?

NO! Diamonds is a much more dangerous suit to you than hearts. If you let East win the first heart, the dastard might change suits and lead a diamond through your ♦K-9. If West has the ♦A-Q, they'll get however many diamonds West has plus the heart trick. You'll go down in a contract cold for ten tricks off the top—arghhhh. Here's the full deal:

♠A J 3		♠10 8 5 4 2
♥9 8		♥K J 2
♦10 8 5		♦4 2
♣A Q J 6 5		♣9 7 3
♠9	W N E	♠10 8 5 4 2
♥Q 7 6 5 3	W S	♥K J 2
♦A Q J 7 5 3		♦4 2
♣7		♣9 7 3
		♠K Q 7 6
		♥A 10 4
		♦K 9
		♣K 10 8 2

Remember the hold-up play is all about communication. When you declare, you want to break communication between the opponents.

Hold-up plays can work for defenders as well as for Declarer. More about that next month.



About That Rule of 11

Ever wonder why the rule of 11 works? Okay maybe not, but I had a little white space, so here goes.

It's all the Ace's fault. He didn't want to be a lowly one; he wanted to be more important than the King. With thirteen cards in a suit, we start counting with the deuce and proceed up to the Ace: the jack becomes 11, queen is 12, king 13, and the ace is 14.

When you lead fourth best, you hold three higher cards, **leaving only 11 possibilities**. Lead the jack (aka the 11) and the other three hands have none higher. A lead of the 10 allows only one higher. [11-10=1] Et cetera. Et cetera.

Well, now you know...