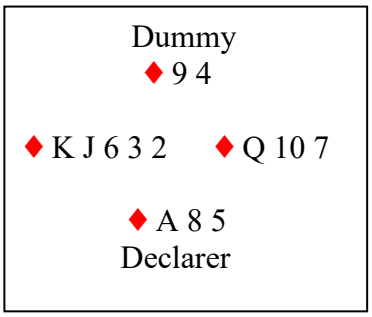
THE HOLD UP PLAY (DUCKING)

When playing a contract of 3NT, we won't always have nine top winners at the outset. We will usually need to lose the lead to set up additional winners. This could be problematical if the opponents have attacked our weak suit to set up winners of their own, but the risks can often be reduced by means of **hold up play**.



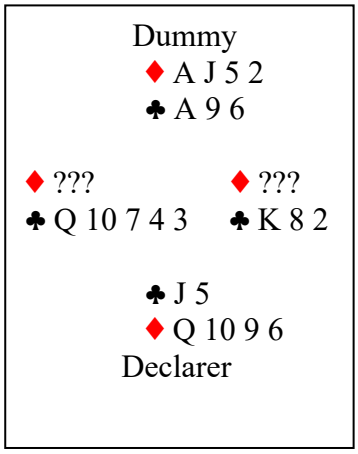
We are in a contract of 3NT and the layout of the diamond suit is as shown on the left. West leads the ♦3 on which East plays ♦Q. West's opening lead might well be from a 5-card suit and ♦A is our only trick in the suit. Once we lose the lead to the opponents in another suit, they will have four more tricks in diamonds so our contract will be defeated. What can be done to prevent this?

The answer is the Hold Up Play (or 'Ducking'). If we don't play the ♦A until the third trick we will improve our chances. If West started with five diamonds and gets the lead later in the play there is nothing we can do but if East gets the lead he has no more diamonds to return to his partner. By holding up twice in diamonds we have cut off their communications.

If West started with only four diamonds the hold up is unnecessary, because the opponents have only three tricks in the suit. But the hold up also doesn't lose anything, so should normally be employed if West's diamond length is uncertain.

See hand 113 (Hold up Play – Level 1) to see the hold up in the context of a full hand.

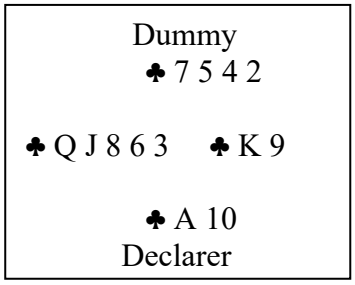
Sometimes the hold-up play can virtually guarantee making a contract that seems problematical:



We are once again playing 3NT and the layout of the minor suits is as shown on the left. We require three diamond tricks to make our contract, but don't know the position of ♦K. When West leads the ♣4 it's natural to play low from dummy in case West's clubs are headed by ♣KQ, but when East continues the suit it's important to duck again. After winning the third round of clubs we enter hand in a major suit to finesse in diamonds. The hold-up is unnecessary if West has ♦K but comes into its own if the finesse loses. East has no clubs to return to his partner's winners because we've again cut the defensive communications,

See hand 1222 (Hold up Play – Level 1) to see these suits in the context of a full hand.

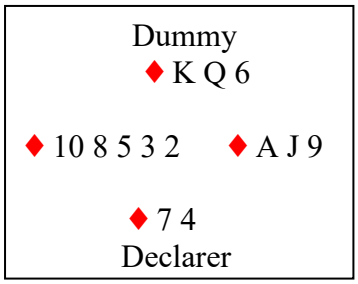
Holding up once can sometimes be sufficient:



West leads ♣6 against our 3NT contract. If clubs are breaking 4-3 it doesn't matter what we do, but if West has five clubs it's important to let East's ♣K hold the trick. We win the club continuation and proceed with setting up winners in another suit. If East is the defender with the entry he'll have no clubs to lead and we've once again made the contract by virtue of our hold up play.

See hand 3065 (Hold up Play – Level 1) to see this suit in the context of a full hand.

It's not always the ace that needs to be held up. For example:

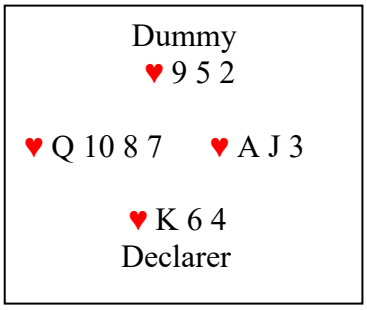


When West leads ♦3 against 3NT it's right to play one of dummy's honours because we have two stoppers if West has led from a suit headed by ♦A. But when East wins the first trick with ♦A and returns ♦J it's important to hold up. This gains if West started with five diamonds and East has the defensive card that we need to knock out.

See 3064 (Hold up Play – Level 1) to see this suit in the context of a full hand.

Sometimes the hold up has no bearing on making the contract but should be performed anyway if it might lead to an overtrick:

We're in 3NT and need to knock out an ace to make our contract. When West leads ♥7

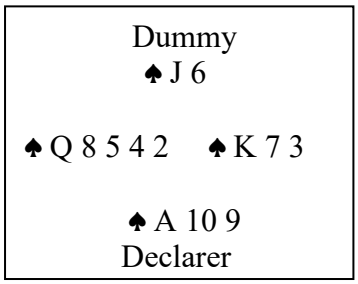


East wins with ♥A and returns ♥J. From the standpoint of making our contract it's perfectly safe to win with ♥K immediately because if East gets the lead and still has a heart to play we can't lose more than three tricks in the suit. Even so, it's better to hold up because this will restrict opponents to two heart tricks if East has the defensive entry.

See hand 2424 (Hold up Play – Level 1) to see this suit in the context of a full hand.

When Not To Hold Up

It's sometimes wrong to hold up. One reason is that winning the first round would provide a second stopper in the suit. For example:



When West leads ♠4 to East's ♠K we must win with ♠A immediately. When we lose the lead the only spade trick for the opponents is ♠Q. If we make the mistake of holding up East will lead through our ♠A to set up the rest of the suit. We'll now go down if West started with ♠Qxxxx and has the defensive entry.

See hand 143 (Hold up Play – Level 2) to see this suit in the context of a full hand.

Finally don't hold up if there is a greater danger if opponents switch to another suit. See hand 139 (Hold up Play – Level 2) for a simple example of this situation.

Where to Find the Example Hands

You can play the example hands and further hands on Hold Up Play from the Declarer Hands menu. Look for declarer hands at level 1 and choose the topic "Hold-up play". Do the same at level 2, where some of the hands are slightly harder.