




A series of deals all about the hold-up. When and why (and also when not) to hold up. Standard American version.

VB#23 Year 1 The Hold-up I. Part 1 SA.	Contract: 3N
Date: 20/10/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

North		East
♠ 973		♠ K8
♥ AT6		♥ 97542
♦ AJ		♦ QT852
♣ J9762		♣ A
West		South
♠ JT642		♠ AQ5
♥ J8		♥ KQ3
♦ 74		♦ K963
♣ K853		♣ QT4

**This series is the second one in this edition that is focussed on *hold-up plays*. We hold-up a high card (generally an Ace) to cut communications between defenders.**

**Used wisely hold-up plays can reduce or eliminate the damage the defenders can do to declarer by breaking the links that they have. Be careful, though, because using a hold-up play in the wrong circumstance might make things worse for declarer, often much worse.**

**Here, in these six (more tricky) deals, you will have to decide whether to win the first trick or not. Much depends on which defender you regard to be the *danger hand* and which the *safe hand*.**

Hand 1. A routine sequence to a routine contract. What should the early play be?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ 4

You reach 3NT rapidly and West kicks off with a low Spade lead (the ♠4, to be exact). East contributes the ♠K – how should you play?

The indispensable **count of tricks** shows us that we have seven on top, made up from two Spades (the opening lead into the ♠A Q tenace guarantees that), three Hearts and two Diamonds. Thus we require two more from somewhere. A Diamond to the ♦J might win but that finesse, even if successful, would only drag the total to eight.

Clubs looks to be the main source of extras. In fact, we could make three Club tricks here after the ♣A K have been driven out. So, take the ♠A and play on Clubs, then? Not so fast! Have you thought hard enough about trick one?

You have two high cards to knock out (the ♣A K) and East-West are trying to knock out two of your high cards (the ♠A Q). Once again, they have the edge in this race by virtue of having the opening lead. Were you to take the first trick, you would fail. How? Well, play it through in your head.

You take the ♠A and play a Club. East takes his ♣A and fires back a Spade. Your second Spade stop goes (either on this trick or the next) and now you are at the mercy of West. Another Club is gobbled up by West (the **danger hand**) who cashes his long Spades. Essentially, you'd lose three Spades and two Clubs.

The counterplay? Try ducking the ♠K at trick one. This hand is very similar to one in the previous series but there we had ♠A K × facing three low cards. It is harder to see when you have the unusual setting of the ♠A Q × and the King appears on your right but the hold-up is indubitably correct. When you have two high cards to knock out it is often right to hold up with a double stopper.

Here, East plays back a Spade at trick two, which you win to play a Club. When East takes the ♣A he has only red cards to play and none of them would cause you any embarrassment. A Heart shift allows you an armchair ride as you can set up the Clubs with all your stoppers intact. In fact, you make an overtrick.





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Date: 20/10/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ KT7		
	♥ K642		
	♦ 73		
	♣ AKT6		
West		East	
♠ A9		♠ 86542	
♥ QJ97		♥ T5	
♦ QT852		♦ K94	
♣ J8		♣ 942	
	South		
	♠ QJ3		
	♥ A83		
	♦ AJ6		
	♣ Q753		

Here you have to decide how to play the deal and who you must keep off lead.

Which of your opponents represents the bigger threat to you – East or West? How can you be sure to keep the dangerous opponent off lead?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♣
1♦	1♥	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: D

You arrive in 3NT after opening 1♣ and seeing West intervene with 1♦. West leads the ♦5 and you are surprised to see East produce the ♦K. What sort of overcall is this? A Queen-high suit?

You can see six top tricks (two Hearts, one Diamond and three Clubs) and so need three more for your contract. A 3-2 break in Clubs will furnish you with one extra and you can knock out the ♠A to set up two more tricks there.

Now, before you play to trick one you must consider whether or not to hold up your ♦A.

If the ♠A lies on your right the threat comes from **East** who will take the Ace and fire a Diamond *through* the vulnerable ♦J 6. If the ♠A is here you should hold-up the ♦A to run East out of Diamonds

However, if the ♠A is on your **left** the threat comes from **West** who will be able to run the Diamonds off if you have no more. If, though, you have retained your ♦J 6 (if you **do not** hold up the ♦A) then you have a second stopper, provided West is on lead.

So... where is the ♠A? Against silent opponents this would be a complete guess. You would toss a coin and decide whether to take the ♦A or not and either choice could be right or wrong. Do you feel lucky?

However, West is the player who broke radio silence with his 1♦ overcall. As it is, with the ♠A, it is repulsive but without the ♠A it would be an absurdity. Some players like to bid and this West is clearly someone who loves to hear the sound of his own voice. 1♦ indeed! A poor suit with a poor hand. It doesn't even take away any bidding space.


So, knowing where the ♠A is thanks to West's careless talk, we take the ♦A at trick one and play the ♠Q to knock out the ♠A. West takes that and, knowing that playing Diamonds again is futile, tries the ♥Q. No sir, no good. We can now try Clubs and when they break in favorable fashion we have our nine tricks.

"Thank you", we say to partner as we we write  
down the score, but our eyes are fixed on West.



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Date: 20/10/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ AQT	
	♥ 42	
	♦ Q97	
	♣ A8652	
West		East
♠ 963		♠ 87542
♥ KT763		♥ Q98
♦ K4		♦ 532
♣ Q94		♣ K7
	South	
	♠ KJ	
	♥ AJ5	
	♦ AJT86	
	♣ JT3	

A hand with a similar theme to Hand 2.

Which of the defenders represents a threat to the contract?

With that in mind, how should the early play go?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 6

Once again you reach 3NT after a straightforward auction; this time West leads the ♥6 lead, which looks like being his fourth-highest Heart.

The essential **count of tricks** shows you that you have six on top (three Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and one Club) so you need to seek out three extras. You could win the first trick with the ♥A, cross to the ♠Q and run the ♦Q. That looks hunky dory (you'd make five Diamond tricks and ten in all if East held the ♦K) but first you must consider whether or not to hold up your ♥A.

On this deal it would be a mistake to hold up your Ace. The ♥Q appears on your right (if it didn't you wouldn't need the ♥A to win the trick!) Now the ♥J 5 in your hand (a classic semi-stopper) is enough to stop the defenders running the Heart suit provided the lead comes from your left. You can guarantee that by finessing the Diamonds through East. No matter what happens, East is not going to gain the lead.

Curiously, the **danger hand** is the player to your right, not the player with the long Heart suit. This is because you can't stand a Heart lead *through* the remaining ♥J × but would love one around to the ♥J ×.

This is the play: You win the first trick with the ♥A because the ♥J 5 stops your left-hand opponent running Hearts. You cross to dummy by overtaking the ♠J with the ♠Q and take the Diamond finesse, running the ♦Q. If that were to win you'd be in the right hand to repeat the maneuver, running the ♦9 next, and you can guarantee keeping East off lead.

In this case the ♦Q loses to the ♦K in the West hand (do our finesses ever win? Yes, but only 50% of the time!) Now, though the necessary extra tricks nestle comfortably in your hand. West shifts to a Club and, seeing the finishing line, you make a dash for it. You grab the ♣A, cash the Diamond winners and finally overtake the ♠K to cash the remaining Spades.

Having taken nine tricks you may lose interest in the proceedings; throw the scraps to the dogs.

Note that you do not make your contract if you hold up your ♥A to the third round. When the Diamond finesse fails West would defeat you by taking one Diamond trick and four Hearts.



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VB#23 Year 1 The Hold-up I. Part 1 SA.

Date: 20/10/2014

Dealer: West

[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N

By: South

Board #: 4

Vulnerable: All

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 6

This deal bears a remarkable similarity to Hand 3. Odd how these things happen in VuBridge...

Once more you reach 3NT and once again West fishes out the ♥6 lead, which bears all the hallmarks of being his fourth-highest Heart.

The indispensable **count of tricks** shows you that you have six on top (three Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and one Club) so you need to establish three extras. You could win the first trick with the ♥A and run the ♦Q. That looks like a plan (you'd make five Diamonds and an overtrick if West held the ♦K) but before you call for a card you must consider whether or not to hold up your ♥A.

The difference between this deal and the previous one is who can be kept off lead. On both deals East is the hand you fear most – a Heart lead through your ♥J × would be fatal. Here, you have to take the critical Diamond finesse into the East hand so you cannot keep East off lead if he happens to hold the all-important ♦K. What to do?

Well, in this case you must hold up the ♥A. So when East takes the ♥Q you let him have it. Another Heart goes to the ♥J and ♥K and West clears the Hearts. Now, though, the positions are reversed. East has become the **safe hand** (he has no Hearts) and West is the **danger hand** (he has two winning Hearts to cash should he gain the lead).

You now take the Diamond finesse, running the ♦Q. If that were to win you'd be in the right hand to repeat the procedure and you could guarantee keeping West off lead. Here, the ♦Q does win so, perking up, you run the ♦9 next. Nope – East was just fooling around. He takes the ♦K on the second round and leads a low Club.

When you can see the harbor you should row for home. You grab the ♣A, cash the Diamond winners and finally take three Spade tricks for your contract. The last trick is the opponents' – you have no interest in which defender wins it.

Note that you do not make your contract if you were to take the ♥A at trick one. When the Diamond finesse fails East would sent a fatal

<p>West</p> <p>♠ 9653</p> <p>♥ KT763</p> <p>♦ 53</p> <p>♣ K7</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ 8742</p> <p>♥ Q98</p> <p>♦ K42</p> <p>♣ Q94</p>
<p>North</p> <p>♠ AQT</p> <p>♥ 42</p> <p>♦ AJT86</p> <p>♣ JT3</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ KJ</p> <p>♥ AJ5</p> <p>♦ Q97</p> <p>♣ A8652</p>

This is a very similar deal to Hand 3.

The suits have been transposed, though, and that might make you think about how that may alter your line of play.


Heart return through the exposed ♥J × and the defense would take one Diamond trick and four Hearts.





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VB#23 Year 1 The Hold-up I. Part 2 SA.	Contract: 3N
Date: 20/10/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ K74	
	♥ 83	
	♦ A953	
	♣ K862	
West		East
♠ Q852		♠ JT93
♥ AT752		♥ Q96
♦ J86		♦ QT2
♣ T		♣ Q94
	South	
	♠ A6	
	♥ KJ4	
	♦ K74	
	♣ AJ753	

Well, it's the old, old story. What do you do at trick one and how does this affect your subsequent play?

Essentially, who is the ***danger hand***?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 5

Another day, another 3NT contract. This time West leads a low Heart (the ♥5) and East plays the ♥Q. What is your best line of play?

The essential **count of tricks** reveals that you have six on top, seven if you include a Heart winner generated by the opening lead. In detail you can see two Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and two Clubs. So you need to make some extras and surely the source that will provide those is Clubs, your longest suit.

What about trick one? Win or duck? What about subsequent play? Do you have a **Plan**?

Well, there is no point in allowing the ♥Q to win trick one. East-West have a counterplay if you do that – East leads a Heart back and West ducks his ♥A. Now, whichever defender gains the lead East-West have four Heart tricks ready and waiting. So the right play is to take the ♥K.

Now what? Well, we have, once again, a half-stopper in the form of the ♥J ×. East is the **danger hand** as a Heart lead from him would be damaging. However, West is the **safe hand** as a Heart lead from him would only give us a cheap trick with the ♥J, regardless of who holds what in Hearts. So we must do all we can to keep East off lead.

The focus now turns to Clubs – that is our source of tricks and we need to set them up. Other things being equal with this combination we'd normally lay down the ♣A and ♣K, hoping that the ♣Q would fall. With only four outstanding Clubs this play gives us a reasonable chance of making five Club tricks. However, we actually only need four Clubs and – as stated – we have to ensure East doesn't gain the lead.


So the best play with that in mind is to cash the ♣K first and then play a Club through East. When that player follows we finesse the ♣J. Should that lose to a doubleton ♣Q × in the West hand we wouldn't mind in the least. West is no threat to us. As the cards lie, though, West shows out of Clubs so we actually pick the suit up without loss. We make two Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and five Clubs. The overtrick is a bonus and is a reward for accurate declarer play.

This play, taking a finesse to ensure a dangerous opponent is kept off lead, goes under the pleasing name of a **safety finesse**.



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VB#23 Year 1 The Hold-up I. Part 2 SA.	Contract: 3N
Date: 20/10/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ 73	
	♥ K86	
	♦ K9642	
	♣ AJ5	
West		East
♠ K65		♠ JT9842
♥ JT3		♥ 9752
♦ T		♦ A8
♣ T98743		♣ K
	South	
	♠ AQ	
	♥ AQ4	
	♦ QJ753	
	♣ Q62	

This looks to be a routine hand, a routine lead and a routine contract.

Did we say "looks to be"?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ T

Here you reach 3NT (despite the 5-5 Diamond fit) and West leads the ♣10.

Well, this is all too easy, right? Run the Club to the ♣Q in hand and make buckets of overtricks if West has led from ♣K 10 9 8 × and still make plenty of tricks if West has led from ♣10 9 8 ×. What a dull hand.

Maybe.

Maybe, though, we ought to return to basic principles here before we fall into the trap of saying (as so many declarers do, in one breath) "Thank you, partner, play small, please". Where's the **Count**? Where's the **Plan**?

The indispensable *count of tricks* shows us that we have just five on top (one Spade, three Hearts and one Club). Where are four extra tricks coming from? Diamonds, of course – once the ♦A has been forced out we can reap the harvest from that field.

So we have nine tricks without any problems unless... unless what? Well, allowing East to gain the lead early and shoot a Spade through the ♠A Q would be unfortunate, to say the least. On this layout it would be fatal.

Suppose you made the "routine" play of running the ♣10 around to the ♣Q in hand. East would win his ♣K and shift to the ♠J. You'd have to try the ♠Q, which would allow West to win the ♠K and clear the Spades. Now you would be tempo behind in the race. When East gained the lead with the ♦A he'd have a fistful of Spades to cash. Oops.

With absolute certainty staring you in the face this is no time to take risks. You must call for the ♣A from table and immediately attack Diamonds, planning to make one Spade, three Hearts, four Diamonds and one Club.

The fall of the singleton ♣K is an unexpected bonus that you may see as another reward for accurate play. Had His Majesty not fallen you were sure of at least nine tricks; now you actually make eleven.

By concentrating your focus on just one area

(the play in the Club suit) it is easy to miss the danger looming from another direction.

We will leave you with the wisdom of Tennessee Ernie Ford. (*Sixteen tons*):

*If you see me comin', better step aside  
A lotta men didn't and a lotta men died  
One fist of iron, the other of steel  
**If the right one don't getcha, then the left  
one will.***