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VB issue 17, year 2. The hold-up play revisited

VB#17 Y2 The hold-up (harder cases) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		
♠	AT6	
♥	95	
♦	863	
♣	KQJ74	
West		East
♠	753	♠ J942
♥	KQJ74	♥ 863
♦	K4	♦ JT97
♣	852	♣ A6
South		
♠	KQ8	
♥	AT2	
♦	AQ52	
♣	T93	

We have already seen the idea of a *hold-up*; a simple play of not taking an early trick when we are able to do so.

The problem that most inexperienced players have with this play is that they hold up on all sorts of unsuitable hands – ducking becomes a reflex action. In these two series in this edition of V-Blue we are challenging you to get the early play right. Sometimes it will be right to hold up the first trick (or two) and sometimes it won't.

The *hold-up* is usually employed in No-trump contracts. Not always, though, as some examples will show.

Remember that the number one reason to duck a trick (let the opponents take one you could win) is to strip one of your opponents of a suit. If you can clear one hand of a suit so that that person cannot return the suit when he's on lead, you create what we call a ***safe opponent***.

Hand 1 is a textbook example. Don't be fooled, though, not all of the deals are as easy as this one. You have been warned!

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

Lead: ♥ K

Our 3NT contract is normal but in some trouble as we have only five *top tricks*, leaving us four tricks short of our target. The preliminary count (a mandatory strategy when dummy goes down) shows these five top tricks to be: three Spades and the two red aces.

Clubs, of course, are going to provide salvation, but we have a problem; if our timing is off, the opponents may take four Heart tricks plus the ♣A.

Since we only have one Heart stopper, and of course they led Hearts, we have to time it just right. If Hearts are 5-3, we need to *hold up* on our stopper, and pray that East has the ♣A.

This is a classic, textbook hold-up play. We run East out of Hearts, and when he turns up with the ♣A, we are safe. We can win any return he makes. If West had started life with five decent Hearts and the ♣A then 3NT was doomed; as the cards actually are a hold-up (double hold-up if you like) ruptures the defensive communications.

One final thought. What if the Hearts split 4-4? Then we are in no danger, as East-West will only take three Heart tricks to go with their ♣A. We will still make our contract. We are protecting ourselves from the worst scenario.


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VB#17 Y2 The hold-up (harder cases) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	2NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ K

This deal illustrates the important principle that you don't hold up when the opening lead has given you a trick (or, in this case, a secondary stopper).

You have a classic 2NT opening bid and North has enough to raise that to game. West leads the ♣K against your game and you have to decide whether to win or duck the ♣A.

North ♠ QJ6 ♥ J43 ♦ QJ9 ♣ T965		East ♠ T853 ♥ QT982 ♦ 752 ♣ 4	
West ♠ 942 ♥ 75 ♦ A4 ♣ KQJ832		South ♠ AK7 ♥ AK6 ♦ KT863 ♣ A7	

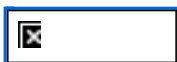
Ducking leads to defeat – a low Club continuation at trick two will knock out the ♣A. (This defense is obvious if West bothers to count the Clubs – he can see ten between his own hand and dummy and both East and South will have played small ones at trick one. There's only one Club left out now...) West has to regain the lead with the ♦A and will gleefully cash his long suit for two down.

Here you are in a normal game contract. As in all of these hands the critical decision comes early...

Take your time and think it through

You have nowhere else to go but Diamonds for nine tricks, you should note – you have only three Spades, two Hearts and a Club “on top”.

If, however, you take trick one with the ♣A all is sweetness and light. Dummy's remaining ♣10 9 6 makes for a secure (albeit slow) Club stopper and 3NT is secure. In fact, it makes an overtrick, whether or not West cashes his Clubs.


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VB#17 Y2 The hold-up (harder cases) Part 1 SA

Date: 07/07/2014

Dealer: South


[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N

By: South

Board #: 3

Vulnerable: E / W

		North			
		♠ 53			
		♥ QJ5			
		♦ AKT7			
		♣ 8652			
West	♠ KT762		East		
				♠ Q94	
				♥ 873	
				♦ 962	
				♣ KT73	
		South			
		♠ AJ8			
		♥ AT92			
		♦ QJ4			
		♣ A94			

Who is your dangerous opponent? The ability to discern who is going to smack you down is a continual challenge and this hand is no different.

You will have two challenges on this hand: Which opponent can hurt you if he gains the lead and should you hold up?

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

Lead: ♠ 6

In this hand, played in 3NT by South, we want to leave our duck in the toy box. West leads a low Spade (to wit: the ♠3) and East goes up with the ♠Q.

Look at the layout of the Spades. If we **do** duck the first trick, East will lead the suit again. Our single stopper will be knocked out and when the Heart finesse loses, (what...you thought it would **succeed**?) out will come the rest of West's Spades. Ugh.

Notice that the hand with the **long** Spades is not the *danger hand*. West is **behind** our ♠J *half-stopper*. If West leads Spades, we are just fine. We don't care who has the ♥K (well, let's say we don't mind so much if West has it) because we are safe.

(What's a "half-stopper"? It's a card that makes you safe if one hand leads the suit but vulnerable if the other hand does. The easiest example of that is this Spade combination:

♠ x x

♠ K x

If West leads a Spade we must make a trick with the ♠K and the defense will be unable to run off the suit. However, if East were to gain the lead and led **through** the ♠K we would be in trouble. Everything then would depend on the location of the ♠A).

Also, we have to think a little about the Diamonds, too. They are the suit that allows us access to the dummy (or to the closed hand), and have to be **unblocked** carefully.

Let's summarize the play. West leads a low Spade to the ♠Q and we take the ♠A. Next we cross to dummy, using Diamonds as an entry. The Heart finesse is taken with safety – "safe" in that the contract doesn't depend on it winning or losing.

When West turns up with the ♥K he is stymied. A Spade continuation would just give us a cheap trick in Spades. Knowing this, West is forced to shift his attention to something else – Clubs in this case. The ♣Q is taken by the ♣A and now it's just a matter of cashing out the red

suits for the contract.


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VB#17 Y2 The hold-up (harder cases) Part 1 SA
 Date: 07/07/2014
 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: ♦ 5

Simple enough bidding (1NT – 3NT) and a simple enough lead from the Western quarter – the fourth highest Diamond (to wit: the ♦5).

East plays the ♦Q and you are faced with a familiar problem – win the ♦A or duck? Well, with this combination the danger hand is **East**, on your right. West is welcome to get in and lead his suit again – all that will do is give you a cheap trick with the ♦J. However, a lead from East **through** the exposed Jack would have East-West picking up four Diamond tricks.

The critical suit here is Clubs and as the Club finesse has to be taken into East it is essential to run that player out of Diamonds. So you must duck the ♦Q, try the ♦J at trick two and then, on winning the ♦A, confidently run the ♣Q not caring whether it wins or loses. This deal is the other side of the coin (aka the obverse) from Hand 3.

As it happens, a sharp West (realizing that his Diamonds are dead) shifts to a Spade. Well defended, sir! That, however, only generates four tricks for the enemy. One Spade, two Diamonds and the ♣K is all they can muster. 3NT makes in any event.

North ♠ A52 ♥ Q63 ♦ 62 ♣ AJ742		East ♠ KT764 ♥ T97 ♦ Q93 ♣ K8	
West ♠ 98 ♥ J854 ♦ KT754 ♣ 63			
South ♠ QJ3 ♥ AK2 ♦ AJ8 ♣ QT95			

Another day, another game contract.

How might you plan the play here?


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VB#17 Y2 The hold-up (harder cases) Part 1 SA
 Date: 07/07/2014
 Dealer: North
[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N
 By: South
 Board #: 5
 Vulnerable: N / S

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

Lead: ♠ 4

Once again, we are in 3NT, playing in our favorite seat – South. West leads a low Spade, which suggests a long suit headed by an honor.

After the never-to-be-neglected ritual of thanking partner for his tidy arrangement of the dummy we also shouldn't neglect our responsibility to **Count** and **Plan**.

We can see eight easy tricks – there are five *top tricks* (three Hearts and two black aces) and three Diamonds that can easily be established by knocking out the ♦A. After that it looks like a battle to find the ninth trick.

We can't find any more winners unless we set up the Clubs, but that gives the rascally opponents too many times on lead. So, let's examine the Spades more closely. How exactly are you going to play this suit?

<p>North</p> <p>♠ J6</p> <p>♥ KQ4</p> <p>♦ T842</p> <p>♣ A762</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ Q85</p> <p>♥ T8762</p> <p>♦ A9</p> <p>♣ J53</p>
<p>West</p> <p>♠ K9742</p> <p>♥ 93</p> <p>♦ 753</p> <p>♣ KQ9</p>		
		<p>South</p> <p>♠ AT3</p> <p>♥ AJ5</p> <p>♦ KQJ6</p> <p>♣ T84</p>

Well, you know the score... what are you going to do here?

Do you play the ♠6 or the ♠J from table? And then what do you do as and when East plays an honor? Win the ♠A or duck? We need to look at this suit combination very carefully.

If you were to rise with the ♠J at trick 1, East would cover with the ♠Q. If you then held up, East would lead *through* your ♠A 10. You would only take **one** trick in Spades. Not good enough.

Suppose, however, that you call for a low card from dummy at trick 1. What can East do? Play the ♠8 (in defiance of "third hand high", you may note)? No good. You grab the ♠10 and have two Spade tricks with ease.

All right, on the ♠6 East does play the ♠Q (probably his best play). Now, by knocking that on the head with the ♠A we can **guarantee** a second trick in Spades because the remaining ♠J and the ♠10 3 are *equals* against the ♠K. Ducking would be fatal.

So, on this hand a hold-up will cost us the contract. You have a brand new toy with your duck. Don't take it out everytime you play. Sometimes you don't need it.

This card combination is worth study. (Actually *all* card combinations are worth study but there

are only 60 minutes in one hour, 24 hours in one day and 365 days in a year...). This one

♠ J ×


♠ A 10 ×

recurs often and (too) many players make a mess of it, either by calling for dummy's ♠J at trick one or by ducking the ♠A. You'll never make that mistake again, will you?


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VB#17 Y2 The hold-up (harder cases) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

<p>North</p> <p>♠ 763</p> <p>♥ A74</p> <p>♦ K63</p> <p>♣ KT87</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ QT982</p> <p>♥ KJ62</p> <p>♦ 9</p> <p>♣ 643</p>	
<p>West</p> <p>♠ KJ4</p> <p>♥ Q93</p> <p>♦ QJT7</p> <p>♣ 952</p>			
<p>South</p> <p>♠ A5</p> <p>♥ T85</p> <p>♦ A8542</p> <p>♣ AQJ</p>			

Many bridge hands are exercises in technical play. Some are tactical (keep the opponents guessing).

How might you go about the play of this deal?

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

Lead: D

Here, as South, we reach 3NT and, slightly surprisingly, West leads the ♦Q. We say "surprisingly" because we have eight diamonds and we'd expect that West would lead one of our weak suits (Spades or Hearts). Still, when Lady Luck comes riding past – grab her!

A **count** of out tricks (you hadn't forgotten about counting *top tricks*, had you?) shows that we have precisely eight (one Spade, one Heart, two Diamonds and four Clubs) so we need one more – and that can only come from establishing the long Diamond.

Now, the lead strongly suggests that the Diamonds are 4-1 (why would West choose to lead from a three-card suit?) so winning the Diamond and playing one back to start the process of setting up the suit would alert West to the true nature of things. He is going to switch suits – and whether he chooses Hearts or Spades we are going to be in trouble.

Best technique is to **duck** the first trick. Not for the reasons that we have given you so far (think about Hand 1 for a clear example) but for deceptive purposes. West is sure to think he has found a sagacious opening lead (something reinforced by his partner's play of the ♦9, which looks to be an encouraging card) and 99 players out of 100 would continue with the ♦J.

That's all the help you need. You can win the Diamond continuation and then play off the Diamonds from the top, conceding the last to West. The last Diamond in hand is a winner and you have your nine tricks. Meanwhile, West will be staring in disbelief at the fact that East discarded at trick two... Oops. No gloating now... just calmly write down the score and listen while East and West have an "interesting" debate about their defense...

This hand used the same technique, but for a different reason: We wanted to set up our **own** suit. We knew we had losers in that suit, and we were smart about it. We gave our losers to the enemy when **we wanted to give them**, NOT when they wanted to take them. Do you see the difference? We controlled the action.

East and West have stopped fighting now.

You can move on to the next series.