

# The Defensive Hold-up

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The key: Duck Smoothly

Defensive Holdups are typically bad for the following reasons:

- A hold-up UNLESS you know why you are holding up is wrong most of the time.
- You give the declarer the timing he needs to do cross-finesses or to get needed transportation.
- You may give the declarer, the critical last trick he needs to make his contract or to be down one not down two.
- You throw partner off if he is counting points.
- You throw off defensive timing. Get your tasks done before declarer does his.
- Also it is never wise to cooperate with declarer. He is wanting to win the trick, you don't want him to.
- When you are behind the honour, take it. If declarer has made a deep finesse, it has worked regardless whether you take your high honour or not. Declarer may have the fillers but is deceiving you by playing a low one.
- declarer may not have touching honours as you assume he has. Dummy is void and declarer leads the King from his hand. He does not necessarily have the queen but is trying to trap an honour.
- You always jump up with a winner while you still have partner's suit to return at notrump.

Here are the cases when hold-ups are wise.

- You have long trump.  
A most valuable principle for declarers is to ruff in the short hand and not in the long-trump hand. The declarer will do all his ruffing in the short-trump hand and draw trump with the long-trump hand. Declarer will draw trump right away if:
  - there is a defensive threat of ruffing.
  - he does not need to set up a pitch before the defenders get in with a trump stopper.
  - he has no short hand ruffs.

Well the above principle works for defenders as well. The defender with the short trump needs to get a ruff if possible and the defender with long trump should hold-up and may eventually get control of the hand.

A good technique for declarer, if a bad trump split is suspected, is to take one round of trump and then let the opponent who likely has long trump and a sure trump winner anyways ruff. This works well if the sure trump winner goes away with a defensive ruff.

- Hold-up to capture an honour.  
Partner leads fourth best, likely from the king and the cards look like.

Q76

3

AJ62

Hold up with the ace if dummy plays small. Throw in the Jack.

- Partner has led a doubleton in a side suit at a trump contract and you have the ace and fear partner won't get to your hand because:
  - either you have no side entry or
  - partner won't find it or
  - declarer has first round control in your side entry suit.

You hold-up once and partner can lead his last card to your ace when he gets in and get his ruff.

A doubleton lead makes sense when a player has a trump stopper (A or K) and partner could have the necessary honour (from the bidding) in the side suit. Sometimes doubleton leads are wrong when declarer has lots of strength and partner has none. Sometimes singleton leads are wrong (therefore doubleton leads are also wrong):

- You have a natural trump trick
  - You have none or one trump.
  - Partner can't have the required strength for the lead to work.
  - It is declarer's first or second suit.
  - You have a natural lead such as KQJx elsewhere.
  - Partner did not bid the suit.
- When you have Axx and declarer has a four-three fit at notrump. If he leads the third card, he may be giving you two tricks if you can convince him (does declarer count out the hand very accurately or not?) you have four cards.
  - declarer or dummy has KQ10x and you don't have the jack with the ace.
    - If you take the King with the ace, declarer now has to take the winning finesse for the jack, but if you hold-up, he will come back to the queen when you take your ace and partner gets his jack.
  - Bath Coup  
LHO leads King from KQxx and declarer has AJx. Hold up hoping opponent will now lead into your ace-jack. Partner must signal attitude, telling partner if he has a surrounding honour, one above or two below.
  - Declarer has touching honours in dummy and finesses you. You cover the last honour unless your honour is a doubleton. You hold up with:

QJ42

K63

A987

While you don't hold-up with:

QJ42

K3

A987

- Declarer takes a finesse and has no outside entries:  
AQJxxx

Kxx

xx

Hold-up once with the king making declarer burn some transportation getting back to his hand. When he takes the finesse a second time, you win the King and he never sees the long suit.

- Hold up when you are in front of an honour. When you are behind the honour, take whatever honour you are given.

KQJx

A10xx

xxx

When declarer plays small from South hand, duck twice so he has to lead up to the KQJx three times, otherwise you get your ten.

- Hold-up when you can outlast a finesse even if partner has led the suit.

Axx

Kxxx                      x

QJ1098

Partner leads top of his doubleton (Rule of 11 says it is not 4th best)

Ax (declarer)

Kxxx                      xx

QJ1098

- Hold up twice when dummy has xx and you have A10xx or A9xxx.

### Further Notes:

How do you tell if the lead is a singleton or a doubleton?

- It is a king or Queen. Not many people lead Kx or Qx unless partner bid the suit.
- Perhaps partner opened Notrump.
- you cannot see a singleton or void in dummy or your hand
  - If you can see a singleton, there is a 68% chance there is another singleton at the table.
- you don't have length in that suit and neither does declarer (from the bidding) or dummy.
- There is a pre-empt at the table.
  - When partner has pre-empted, treat his side-suit lead as a singleton
- As a side, a singleton trump is never led on the opening lead. It is led after the dummy is seen and declarer's strategy becomes apparent.
- If you are the opener leader, be on a singleton watch (assuming it is a trump contract) when partner leads a side-suit at his first chance.

How do you tell if a lead is a stiff, doubleton or 4th best or top of nothing:

- I actually lead my second card from 9632 which partner reads as a top of nothing suit.
- If partner leads the 7, and you see 5 cards higher than the 7, it is not fourth best and now you use the bidding clues and the clues from your own hand to determine if it is a singleton, doubleton or top of nothing.

- Rule of 11

If the 7 is fourth best and it is led, there are  $11-7 = 4$  cards higher than the 7 in dummy, your hand and declarer's hand.

If the the lowest possible card (you can see the lower cards) is fourth best, you know how many cards the declarer has.

Rule of 11 will help you determine whether a card can be fourth best or if it is:

- a singleton
  - a doubleton
  - top of nothing
- Low from a doubleton leads (needs a pre-alert at the beginning of every round)
    - Not in partner's suit
    - against a suit contract
    - not trump
    - Now any little card is a card of interest (a doubleton or from an honour) and any large card is a top of nothing lead.
- Boston = Bottom of Something or Top of Nothing