



Bridge Cardplay: An Easy Guide

HOLDING UP A STOPPER

David Bird & Marc Smith

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1. Basic hold-up in no-trumps

One of the most important cardplay techniques is the hold-up of a high card, to break defensive communications in the suit led.

	♠ K 3 2											
	♥ 7 6											
	♦ A 10 9 6											
	♣ A 10 3 2											
♠ 10 7 5	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; text-align: center; font-size: 2em;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 9 8 4	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ K Q J 9 4		♥ 8 5 2										
♦ 8 3 2		♦ K 4										
♣ Q 6		♣ J 9 7 5										
	♠ A Q 6											
	♥ A 10 3											
	♦ Q J 7 5											
	♣ K 8 4											

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

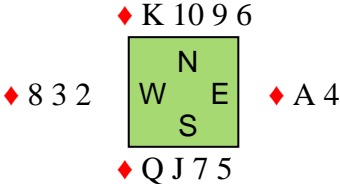
West leads the ♥K, and you count seven top tricks. You can easily establish two more tricks in diamonds, even if the finesse loses. What you cannot afford is to lose a diamond finesse when the defenders can then cash four winners in hearts.

East is the only defender who can win a diamond trick. You must aim to remove his hearts before taking the diamond finesse. This is easily done by **holding up the ♥A for two rounds**.

You win the third round of hearts and run the $\heartsuit Q$. This loses to East's $\heartsuit K$, but he has no heart to play. You will win his return and cash a total of nine tricks for the contract.

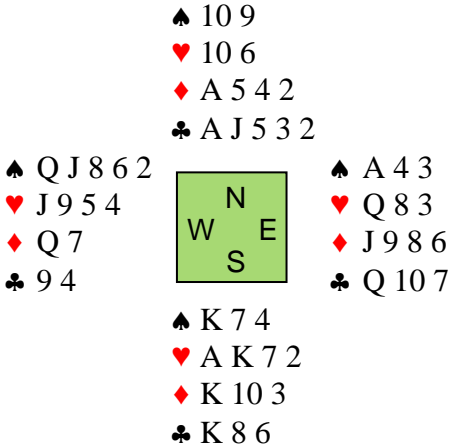
What would have happened if the defenders' hearts split 4-4? East would have had a heart to return, but only three heart tricks would be available to the defense. You would still make the contract.

Let's keep the same deal and change the diamond suit:



You hold up the $\heartsuit A$ until the third round, as before, and play a diamond. Luck is with you when it is East, rather than West, who holds the $\heartsuit A$. Again, he has no heart to play. You will win his return and make the contract. If West had held the $\heartsuit A$ alongside his five hearts, there would have been no way to make the contract.

Sometimes, holding up a king is similarly effective:



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Quiz Hands

1.

♠ 8 4 2
♥ K 2
♦ K 10 8 5 2
♣ A Q 3

♠7 led



♠ K 10 5
♥ A 8 4
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ K 8 7

West opens 1♠, followed by two passes. You bid a protective 1NT and North raises to 3NT. How will you play when West leads the ♠7 to East's ♠Q?

2.

♠ 8 5 3
♥ K J 10 3
♦ A J 10
♣ 10 5 3

♠2 led



♠ A 10 6
♥ Q 7 4
♦ K Q 8 3
♣ A 9 2

You open 1NT, partner raising to 3NT. How will you play this when West leads the ♠2 to East's ♠K?

Answer to Quiz Hand 1

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

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

West leads the ♠6, East playing the ♠Q, and you pause to make a plan. What will it be?

If you win the first trick, you will have six top tricks. When you play on diamonds, it is crystal clear that West (who opened the bidding) will win with the ♦A and score at least four spades to beat the contract.

“Yes, but what can I do about it?” you may be wondering. If West holds five spades to East’s two, there is no way to make the contract. You must hope that West has six spades. In that case East will have no spade to return if you allow the ♠Q to win!

Let’s say that East switches to a heart. You win and set up the diamond suit. You may never score a spade trick, it’s true, but you will make two hearts, four diamonds and three clubs – enough for the contract.

Perhaps the winning play seems a bit difficult, the first time you see it. The point to remember is that you **know** you will go down if you win the first spade. You should therefore at least consider what might happen if you hold up the king.

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Whether you are just setting out to discover the wonderful game of bridge, or have played for some time, your success will be limited without a sound understanding of the basic techniques of cardplay.

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- Basic hold-up in notrumps
- Holding up a double stopper
- Positional second stoppers
- Holding up in a trump contract
- Avoiding the danger hand
- Other hold-up situations



DAVID BIRD (Southampton, UK) is the world's most prolific bridge writer, with over 150 bridge books to his name. Known for the clarity of his writing and explanations, he has won the American Bridge Teachers' Association Book of the Year Award a record nine times. His celebrated humorous fiction series, featuring the cantankerous Abbot, has run for over 45 years.



MARC SMITH (Southampton, UK) is the author, with Barbara Seagram, of the world's best-selling bridge book in the past sixty years, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*. He has written many other bridge books and played successfully in several international championships. He is a popular online bridge teacher, conducting classes at all levels of play.



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