

The Hold-Up Play

Bridge Club 2/11/2019

The hold-up play in bridge is super important because it is used to disrupt or completely eliminate communication between the opponents. It can be utilized by either the defenders to separate declarer and dummy, or it can be used by declarer to separate the defenders from each other.

This first hand is an example from a website. Note that there is a mistake and East has 14 cards (3-4-3-4) and North has 12 cards. Let us pretend that North has one more club and east has one less club. It is not too important for the main idea of this hand.

♠ 87	
♥ A43	
♦ KQJ109	
♣ 105	
♠ KQJ102	♠ 654
♥ 765	♥ 10982
♦ 6	♦ A87
♣ Q832	♣ K974
♠ A93	
♥ KQJ	
♦ 5432	
♣ AJ6	

The contract is 3NT. The auction should go 1NT by South, which shows 15-17 high card points and a hand without a singleton or a void. South has 15 high card points (4 in spades, 6 in hearts, 5 in clubs). After a pass from West, North should bid 3NT. North bids 3NT because with their 10 points, and South's at least 15, there are 25 points and therefore enough to bid game.

Against 3NT, West should lead the ♠K to try to set up their long spade suit. Once the ♠A is gone, the rest of West's spades will be high. When dummy comes down, the first thing that we do as declarer is count our tricks. We have 1 sure spade trick, 3 sure heart tricks, 1 sure club trick for 5 total tricks. The suit that will provide the rest of the tricks is diamonds. The main danger in this hand is that you have to lose to the ♦A, at

which point the opponents will have all the high spades to start taking, which you cannot afford.

The only way to make this contract is what we call the hold-up play. What we do is to wait to take our ♠A. On the first trick where West plays the ♠K, we play low. We continue to play low the second trick when the ♠Q is lead. Finally, we are forced to win the third spade trick. Now when we go to set-up the diamonds, when East wins with the ♦A, they will no longer have any spades to get back to the West hand. Now you will be able to win 4 diamonds, 1 spade, 3 hearts, and 1 club for 9 total tricks!