

# Declarer Concepts for NT

## Overview

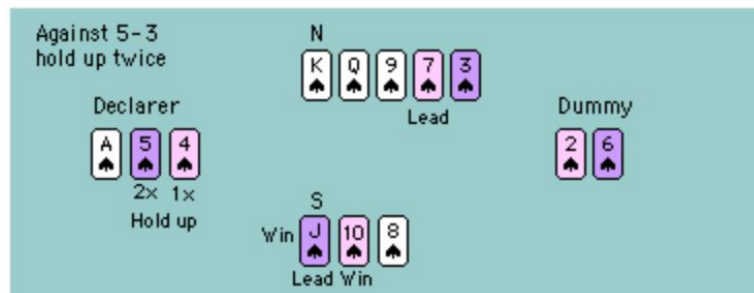
1. General Things to know
2. Hold-Up Play
3. Avoidance play

## General Things to know about NT contracts

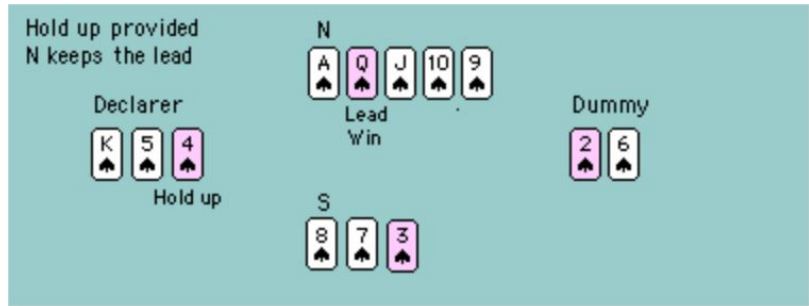
1. The more even the high card points between declarer and dummy, the easier the contract is to play
  - a. This is why 1NT-P-P-P and 2NT-P-P-P are contracts that are so hard to play, and that you've likely experienced yourselves. The reason behind this is that you will be mostly be playing out of your hand and will find it difficult to take any finesses.
2. 5332 distribution is good for notrump because you are balanced and you can have a source of tricks. 4333 is still a bad distribution because even though you are balanced, you don't really have a way to get many tricks.
3. This may be common sense, but hands with voids should really be avoiding NT contracts
4. The biggest thing to make sure to value are good spot cards (meaning cards lower than J). In suit contracts, these don't matter as much because most of the time declarer can trump after a few rounds. Because each suit will be played for multiple times, the 10's,9's,and 8's become much more valuable. Because of this, it also becomes more important to keep track of what card is now the highest for each suit.

## Hold-Up Play

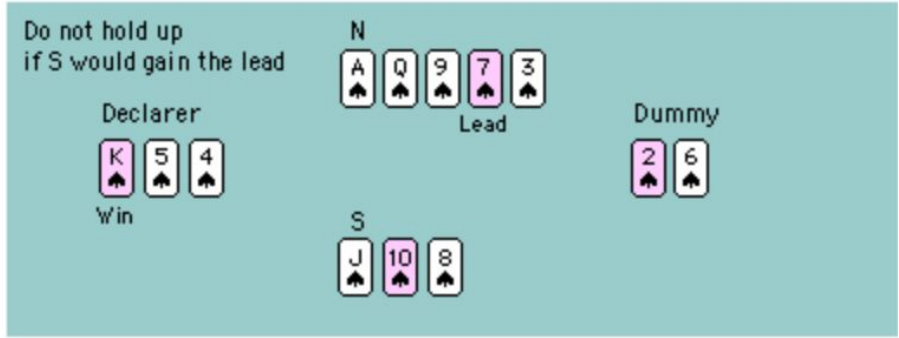
1. The Hold-Up play is a very common technique used to cut the communication between the defenders so they can't run their long suit. Sample situations below.
  - a. Sometimes you have to hold up more than once as well.



- b. But what if you don't have the Ace, but have the King instead? How do you hold up with just the King? You should hold up as long as it is safe. So as North leads the Queen, it is safe to hold up a round. If North plays the Ace, your King takes the third trick. If North plays the Jack then you have to take your King. Otherwise you won't get your King at all since North can just play the Ace on the third trick.



Holding up the King works because South cannot gain the lead and therefore cannot lead through your King. Here is a situation where you are forced to take



the first trick with the King.

- c. AJx opposite xx when the left hand opponent leads the K (promising the Q).
  - i. Explanation: KQ is on your left. You only get one trick if you take the Ace now because your right hand opponent can lead through you. You want to duck to bait your left hand opponent to continue so that you can score your A and J.
  - ii. This technique is called a Bath Coup.

**Avoidance Play**

1. The Avoidance Play is used in combination with the hold up play in order to play the NT as safe as possible. Here is a possible hand below.

**Declarer**  
 ♠ - Q 10 7  
 ♥ - A 9 3  
 ♦ - A J 10 9 2  
 ♣ - A 8

**Dummy**  
 ♠ - A K J 9  
 ♥ - 7 5  
 ♦ - K 7 4  
 ♣ - J 9 7 3

2. So the contract is supposed supposed to be 3NT. Pretend that North had overcalled 1H on this hand and then lead the KH. Therefore you know that North has at least 5 hearts, which means that South has at most 3. The first thing that we always do is count our tricks. In this case we have 4 spades, 1 heart, 2 diamonds, 1 club for 8 total tricks. We need 1 more trick and the most likely suit to provide us this extra trick is diamonds.
3. The danger is that you have to guess how to play diamonds. If you take the AH on the first trick and then just play diamonds, your contract is on a guess. There is a safer way to play this hand. Therefore you must hold up the first two heart tricks and win the third. The reason for doing this is that you want to cut-off communication between the North and South hands here.
4. Once you have cutoff communication between North and South you can safely play the diamond suit. The way of doing this is to play the JD from your hand and duck it in dummy. Even if South wins with the Q, they have no way to get to North's good hearts and you will take the rest of the tricks.

When not to Hold-up

1. Sometimes it is best not to hold-up because there are bigger threats than the opening

### Declarer

♠ - Q 10 7  
 ♥ - A K 3  
 ♦ - A Q 10 8 2  
 ♣ - K 8

### Dummy

♠ - A K J 9  
 ♥ - 8 5  
 ♦ - 9 7 4  
 ♣ - 7 5 3 2

lead.

2. The JH is lead from North and you have to think about the tricks you have and where the threat is. You have 4 spades, 2 hearts, and 1 diamonds for 7 total tricks. Normally we would want to hold-up so that we can prevent the defense from getting heart tricks. But now we have to win since clubs is the greater threat. We want North to be on lead so South cannot lead clus through us. It is possible that we can lose 4 clubs and 1 diamond if South leads diamonds.
3. Therefore we go to dummy's AS and then lead the 9D and duck it to North. North can lead another heart which we can win and repeat the finesse. As long as North doesn't have the K and J of diamonds, we will make our contract.