



Hold Up in Dummy's Suit

The fate of many a contract depends on whether declarer can establish a long suit in dummy. Your job, as a defender, may be to prevent this at all costs.

On some days, this is easy:

<p>♠ 9 8 ♥ 2 ♦ K Q J 9 6 5 4 ♣ J 7 5</p>		<p>♠ Q 10 4 2 ♥ J 9 8 7 ♦ A 10 3 ♣ K 8</p>	<p>♠ J 7 5 ♥ Q 10 6 4 3 ♦ Void ♣ Q 10 6 3 2</p>
<p>♠ A K 6 3 ♥ A K 5 ♦ 8 7 2 ♣ A 9 4</p>			

West	North	East	South
	3♦	Pass	3NT
End			

West leads the ♥4, won by declarer, who plays a diamond. East can defeat the contract by holding up the ♦A until the third round.

Before we move on, consider what might happen if West had led a club. Dummy plays low, and East must not play the ♣K – if he does, the ♣J suddenly turns into an entry and a dead dummy springs back to life. Do not do that. Killing dummy's suit is not just about the hold-up; it is a way of life that can begin at trick one.

When dummy has a long suit with no semblance of an outside entry, it is easy to see the need to hold up your stopper. A well-trained partner should be able to signal to you how many cards in the long suit he started with, telling you on which round to take your winner. When, unfortunately, dummy has outside entries, things become (much) more complicated.

<p>♠ 9 8 ♥ 8 5 ♦ K Q 10 9 6 5 ♣ A 5 3</p>		<p>♠ Q 10 4 3 ♥ J 9 7 ♦ A J 3 ♣ K 8 4</p>	<p>♠ J 7 5 2 ♥ Q 10 6 4 ♦ 4 ♣ 9 7 6 2</p>
<p>♠ A K 6 ♥ A K 3 2 ♦ 8 7 2 ♣ Q J 10</p>			

After the same auction, South is again in 3NT. West leads a low spade. Do you want to play or defend?

You should defend.

Declarer will win the lead and play a diamond to the ♦K. East has two diamond tricks whether he wins this or not. However, the difference is all about timing. If we take the first diamond, declarer might win the return in hand and play another diamond, setting up the suit *while the ♣A is still in dummy as an entry*. In contrast, if we hold up on the first round of diamonds, declarer can never get the suit going.

What happens if declarer chooses to play a diamond to the ♦10 instead? This prevents East from ducking and so is a good play. However, declarer is not the only one who can play well. After taking the ♦J, there is just one defence worth talking about – can you see it?

Right, East can switch to the ♣K, giving up his club trick to knock out dummy's entry (the Merrimac coup) – declarer has to win or East goes back to spades. I do not include this unusual play here just to be dramatic. Rather, it shows the lengths to which a defender must go to kill the dummy.

Now for a scary one: same auction, same contract and a spade lead from your long-suffering partner.

<p>♠ 9 8 ♥ 8 5 ♦ A Q J 10 9 6 5 ♣ 5 3</p>		<p>♠ Q 10 4 3 ♥ J 9 7 ♦ K 3 ♣ K Q J 10</p>	<p>♠ J 7 5 2 ♥ Q 10 6 4 ♦ 4 2 ♣ 9 7 4</p>
<p>♠ A K 6 ♥ A K 3 2 ♦ 8 7 ♣ A 8 6 2</p>			

When declarer wins and finesses in diamonds, East needs to duck, doing so *smoothly*. If you duck with sufficient nonchalance, declarer will surely repeat the diamond finesse... and regret it.

Here is one final example:

<p>♠ A 9 5 ♥ 9 ♦ K Q J 9 8 7 ♣ 7 6 2</p>		<p>♠ J 8 6 2 ♥ J 3 2 ♦ A 5 3 ♣ Q 10 5</p>	
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South is in 3NT, having bid hearts strongly. West leads the ♣4. Declarer wins your ♣Q with the ♣K and plays a diamond... ♦10 from West.

Whilst the hold-up is a sound general strategy, you must ask yourself what is going on. The usual aim of the hold-up is to stop declarer from establishing dummy's suit. On this deal, nothing can shut out the diamonds; and it is too late to try to dislodge the ♠A entry.

What we can do is grab the ♦A and return the ♣10. If partner's clubs are running and declarer has eight top tricks, this defence will be essential. ■