

Holdup Plays – The Rule of 7

By Henry Jackson

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- From July to December 2016 Phillip Alder wrote an excellent series of articles for the Bridge Bulletin on the subject of Holdup Plays.
- In a holdup play, Declarer allows Defenders to win one or more early tricks in a suit in an effort to break their communication for taking more tricks in that suit later.
- The Rule of 7 helps Declarer decide how many tricks to wait before winning.

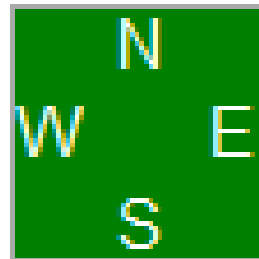
Why Wait?

♠ A 3 2

♥ A K 4

♦ Q 7 6 5

♣ A Q 2



♠ 9 7

♥ 7 5 2

♦ K J 10 9 8

♣ K 8 6

West

East

Pass

2 N

3 N

Pass

3 N

Trick

Lead

2nd

3rd

4th

1. N

♠ K

9

5

?

Count Your Tricks

- West can count 1 spade, 2 hearts and 3 clubs.
- Another 4 tricks are available in diamonds, but Declarer must give up the lead in establishing diamonds.
- If spades are 4-4 there is no problem because the Defenders can take only 3 spades and 1 diamond.
- But if spades do not divide evenly, they can cash 5 or more tricks when they get in.

What Do You Need?

- You need to take your ace when one of the Defenders plays his last spade and hope that the Defender with long spades does not have the diamond ace.
- Allowing the Defenders to win the “right” number of spade tricks will give you the most tricks.
- Holding up too few times may cost you the contract and too many will get you a poor result.

The Rule of 7

- Add the number of cards that Dummy and Declarer hold in the suit being led.
- Subtract that number from 7.
- Hold up that many times.
- In the example – $3+2=5$ and $7-5=2$
- Hold up **two** times and win trick 3.
- If one defender has 5 spades, his partner will be out and cannot lead a spade when he gets in.

The Rule of 7 Is Not Perfect

- While the Rule of 7 is helpful, Declarer must still think when using it.
- Blind use can result in bad results.
- Always count your winners first!
- Pay attention to the bidding – someone opening a weak two usually has a 6 card suit but the rule may tell you to hold up 2 or more times!

How About This Hand?

♠ A 3 2
 ♥ 8 6 4
 ♦ A Q 7 6
 ♣ A Q 2



♠ 9 7
 ♥ 7 5 2
 ♦ K J 10 9 8
 ♣ K 8 6

West

East

Pass

1 N

Pass

1 N

Trick

Lead

2nd

3rd

4th

1. N

♠ K

9

5

?

The Rule Says Hold Up 2 Times!

- Holding up 2 times is really dumb!
- After the Defenders win the first trick or two in spades, they may shift to hearts and win several more!
- You have 9 running tricks!
- Grab the first trick (happy that they didn't lead a heart) and run for cover!