

Learning Points – Hold Up for the Setting Trick

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E Deals
E/W Vul

♠ 1052
♥
♦ KJ86
♣ KQJ764

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NABC*

Both defenders had to be alert to hold-up plays in different suits to force declarer into a set. Any positive score by E/W on this deal will score well.

♠ AJ8	N	♠ 9763
♥ 872		♥ A10654
♦ 9543	W 6 E	♦ A7
♣ A93	S	♣ 85

The Bidding

N/S conducted a standard forcing NT auction through 3♣.

However, South got a little overboard, perhaps hoping for the perfect 12 HCP from partner for the 3♣ bid. 3NT is clearly a stretch

♠ KQ4
♥ KQJ93
♦ Q102
♣ 102

Deep Finesse:
NS 1♠, 2♦
2♣, 1N
S 2N

The Play

East's opening lead is not 4th best. We play attitude leads. The lead of a small spot card promises an A, K or Q in the suit led. When from length, this lead will be 4th best. The ♠7 here is a high spot denying a top honor, but implying length (3 or more spades). No use leading hearts. North has 5 and we're not in the business of developing opponent's suits for them.

East	South	West	North
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♣
Pass	3NT	Passed Out	
East leads ♠7			

North chose to play the ♠Q and West ducked, creating an ♠AJ tenace over the board's ♠K4. Declarer then led the ♥K, showing out in hand. East ducked the 2nd heart as well. Declarer appears to have entries to the hearts so the only way to shut down the suit as a source of tricks is to make a 3rd lead too costly. Declarer switched to clubs, and West ducked the first trick, taking the 2nd. This duck is necessary to cut communication to Declarer's hand.

Declarer switches to diamonds. East can take the Ace on the 1st or 2nd trick, it doesn't matter. East must continue spades, and West must return a heart after cashing spades. North can't have the ♠A and East is marked with the ♥A. After cashing spades, and a heart back, East can cash the 4th spade – Down 2 for + 100 and 20 out of 25 match points on the board.

Post Mortem

From declarer's perspective the spade lead makes finessing the ♠J risky. If North had ducked, we take our 3 spade tricks early. The hold up plays – there were 3 – count them! – are a useful technique to make declarer's road harder by eliminating transportation between hands.

There's an adage in this game that you let declarer win early tricks so defense can win more later. If you do hold up your winners, be sure to cash them in time! Hold them too long and you will get run over (see what happens if East fails to switch to a spade when in with the ♦A).

It's possible for East to overlook the spade continuation since partner played the ♠8 to the 1st trick. Don't be fooled. North's 1NT response denied 4 spades. Partner should have 3-4 spades on this auction. With both minor suit aces out, continuing a minor risks giving declarer tricks they don't deserve. A spade is always right. If North has the ♠A, then partner might have compensating honors in the minors to stop the impending landslide of tricks for declarer.