



A Double Holdup

A holdup play is where you can win a trick but you intentionally allow the opponents to win. The payoff comes later. It may be additional tricks or safety against some calamity. We see it often when we play in notrump and have only one winner in the suit led by the defenders. Look at this hand

Dealer: South		North	
Vulnerability: None		♠K 6 4	
Opening Lead: ♦7		♥K 8 6 4	
		♦6	
		♣A J 10 7 2	
	West		East
	♠J 8 5 2		♠10 7 3
	♥Q 5		♥J 10 7 3
	♦A 10 8 7 3		♦J 9 4
	♣5 3		♣K 8 4
		South	
		♠A Q 9	
		♥A 9 2	
		♦K Q 5 2	
		♣Q 9 6	

Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	Pass	2♣	Pass	1NT
	Pass	3NT	All Pass	2♦

Result: Making 9 tricks; +400 for North/South

Playing 15-17 points, South opens with 1NT. North has the necessary points for game and tries to find a playable spot in hearts. He uses Stayman but is not rewarded when partner denies a 4-card major with her bid of 2♦. North retains captaincy and rebids 3NT.

The ♦7 is led and the dummy comes down. South counts her sure tricks: 3 spades, 2 hearts, 1 diamond (given the lead) and 1 club. Three more tricks can be developed in clubs even if the finesse loses.

You call for the ♦6 from dummy and East rises with the ♦J. Who wins the first trick?

If you said South you are in big trouble. Assume you take the ♦Q and lead the ♣Q, letting it ride to East's ♣K. East will now lead the ♦9 (top of a remaining doubleton). If you cover with the ♦K, West wins and takes the remaining diamonds, setting the contract.

Now go back and duck the first diamond trick. By allowing East's ♦J to hold the trick you've *held up* on the trick. So now East leads the ♦9. What do you play on that trick?

If you said the ♦Q or ♦K, you are again, in big trouble. You will be allowed to win the trick but when you try the club finesse, the same thing will happen. East will lead his remaining diamond and whatever you play will be taken by West who will again clear the suit, winning 4 diamonds and 1 club to set the contract.

Let's go back to that second trick and duck again. Now East leads his last diamond and you rise with your honor. If West takes the trick with his ♦A it is the last diamond the opponents take. You can win any card West returns in your hand and take the losing finesse. By this time East is out of diamonds and the rest of the tricks are yours. They took the first three diamond tricks and the club trick but not enough to set your 3NT contract.

This situation comes up often in notrumps. There is a rule of thumb that helps you recognize the holdup and the number of times you must hold up. It is called "the rule of 7." When you have only one stopper in a suit, count the total number of cards between you and the dummy that you hold in that suit. Subtract the sum from 7 and that is the number of times you must hold up. In this deal you have 5 diamonds, therefore, you should hold up 2 times – **a double holdup!**