

## DECLARER PLAY

### THE DUCK & FRIENDS Card Play Strategy

# Bridge Lab

*with the Monroes*

Careful and effective use of entries is one of the basic arts of card play and can make or break a contract. When developing tricks in a long suit, how do you know when it's right to play an ace, overtake, or even purposely lose tricks to guarantee an entry?

#### THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP ON ANY HAND IS BEFORE THE PLAY OF THE 1ST CARD

<b>SURE TRICKS</b>	How many sure tricks winners are there? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tricks you can take without giving up the lead.</li></ul> How many extra extra tricks are needed for the contract? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can you afford to lose the lead to develop tricks?</li></ul>
<b>TARGET TRICKS</b>	What suit(s) offer a source for extra tricks? This is the "target" suit, often a long side suit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How many tricks are needed from a target suit?</li><li>• What technique(s) is used to establish tricks?</li></ul>
<b>MISSING CARDS</b>	How are the missing cards in the long suit likely to divide (favorable odds)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan for an unfavorable break in missing cards.</li></ul>
<b>ENTRY</b>	Entries are everything! <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preserve or create an entry to the long suit tricks.</li></ul>

## SAFETY PLAYS

**The Safety Play is Declarer's Friend.** Declarer plays a suit in a way to guard against a bad break and preserve tricks needed for the contract.

<b>THE DUCK</b>	<b>PRESERVE CARD PLAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DECLARER &amp; DUMMY HANDS</b> <b>GOAL.</b> Preserve an entry to established tricks in a long suit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Declarer plays a small card and surrenders a trick which could be won.</li></ul>
<b>THE HOLD-UP</b>	<b>BREAK CARD PLAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEFENDERS</b> <b>GOAL.</b> Control the danger suit to prevent opponents from taking too many tricks. The Hold-Up is refusal to win a trick (usually the ace) when the opponents lead a suit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold up until one defender is out of cards in a suit and cannot lead the danger suit back to their partner.</li><li>• Hold up to determine how the suit is dividing.</li></ul>

## DON'T DUCK

- You have enough sure tricks to make your contract.
- You have only one chance to win a trick in the suit.
- You can develop a lower honor or spot card into a second stopper in the suit.
- There is a possibility that the opponents will switch to another, more dangerous suit.

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# The Duck & Friends

## Duck, Save Entries

**Board 1**  
South Deals

	♠ 10 2		
	♥ 6 3		
	♦ A 9 5		
	♣ A 7 6 5 4 2		
♠ 9 7 4	N	♠ K Q 8 3	
♥ J 10 8 5 4	W	♥ 9 7 2	
♦ Q 8 6	E	♦ J 10 4	
♣ K Q	S	♣ J 9 8	
	♠ A J 6 5		
8	♥ A K Q		
8 7	♦ K 7 3 2		
17	♣ 10 3		

West	North	East	South
			1 N
Pass	2 N <sup>1</sup>	Pass	3 N
All pass			
1. 8-9, no 4-card Major, Invitational			

**Contract:** 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

**Lead:** ♥ J Top of Sequence, East plays ♥ 2.

**Sure Tricks:** 1-♠, 3-♥, 2-♦, 1-♣ = 7.

**Play:** Long suit is ♣s, Must duck a ♣, win the second ♣ with the ♣ A and play another ♣. Since the ♣s split 3-2, the ♦ A is the entry to 3 ♣ winners.

## Create an Entry in ♥s

**Board 2**  
South Deals

	♠ Q 5		
	♥ Q J 10		
	♦ K Q 10 9 2		
	♣ 8 7 4		
♠ 6 4 2	N	♠ K J 10 7	
♥ K 9 8 6 2	W	♥ 5 3	
♦ 7 3	E	♦ A 8 5 4	
♣ Q J 9	S	♣ 10 6 3	
	♠ A 9 8 3		
10	♥ A 7 4		
6 8	♦ J 6		
16	♣ A K 5 2		

West	North	East	South
			1 N
Pass	3 N	All pass	

**Contract:** 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

**Lead:** ♥ 6, 4th highest, East plays ♥ 3.

**Sure Tricks:** 1-♠, 1-♥, 2-♣ = 4.

**Play:** South wins the ♥ A to create an entry to dummy. The ♦ J wins and the next ♦ drives out the ♦ A. The ♥ J eventually becomes an entry to 3 winning ♦s.

## The Hold Up - Rule of 7

**Board 3**  
North Deals

	♠ 9 5		
	♥ 4		
	♦ K 9 8 3		
	♣ Q J 10 9 8 3		
♠ Q 10 2	N	♠ J 8 7 6 4	
♥ K J 9 6 2	W	♥ Q 10 3	
♦ J 7 2	E	♦ Q 10 4	
♣ 7 5	S	♣ A 2	
	♠ A K 3		
6	♥ A 8 7 5		
7 9	♦ A 6 5		
18	♣ K 6 4		

West	North	East	South
	3 ♣	Pass	3 N
All pass			

**Contract:** 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

**Lead:** ♥ 6, 4th highest. East plays ♥ Q

**Sure Tricks:** 2-♠, 1-♥, 2-♦ = 5.

**Play:** West may have at least four ♥s, Win the third ♥ trick. It won't matter if East has four ♥s, that would mean West has only four ♥s also. Promote ♣s. Hope East has the ♣ A.

**Board 4**  
North Deals

	♠ K 10 3		
	♥ 4		
	♦ K Q J 10 9 8		
	♣ A 7 6		
♠ 6 5 4	N	♠ 9 8 2	
♥ K J 9 2	W	♥ Q 10 6 3	
♦ A 3	E	♦ 7 4	
♣ 10 5 4 2	S	♣ K Q J 9	
	♠ A Q J 7		
13	♥ A 8 7 5		
8 8	♦ 6 5 2		
11	♣ 8 3		

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♥ <sup>1</sup>
Pass	2 ♦ <sup>2</sup>	Pass	2 N <sup>3</sup>
Pass	3 N	All pass	

1. 4+ ♥s, 6+ points, Forcing
2. 6 ♦s unbalanced
3. 11-12, invite NT game

**Contract:** 3 NT South, 9 Tricks

**Lead:** ♥ 2, 4th highest, East plays ♥ Q.

**Sure Tricks:** 4-♠, 1-♥, 1-♣ = 6.

**Play:** Win the ♥ A at once. The ♥ 2 opening lead shows a 4-card suit, ♥s are breaking 4-4 and only three ♥ tricks will be lost. Fear the ♣ switch.




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## Rule of 7

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### The Rule of 7?

Rules? Schmules. There are too many "Rules of #x" out there. I prefer the Rule of Thinking.

If you must know, the "Rule of 7" was designed to tell declarer in notrump how many times to hold up. For example, say he gets a heart lead and this is the heart suit:

♥5 4	How many times should declarer hold up?
	The Rule says to total up your hearts (you have 5) and subtract from 7.
♥A 8 7	That leaves "2" which is how many times you should hold up.

Now, let's forget that rule (I never use it) and try some good old logic instead.

We will look at 4 deals and in each case we will have ♥4 opposite ♥A875.

Let's start with this one:



Against 3NT, West leads the ♥2 (fourth best).

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

What does the Rule of 7 say?

What does the Rule of Thinking say?

The Rule of 7 says to hold up twice (7-5).

The Rule of Thinking says to win the first heart and don't hold up.

From the lead of the deuce (4th best), declarer knows the hearts are splitting 4-4. Not only does that make a hold-up play irrelevant, but it gives the defense a chance to switch to a

devastating club and defeat the contract. Winning the first heart produces 9 tricks.

On this deal the Winning Play was to hold up 0 times.

Let's try another:

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

This time East opens 2♥ and South reaches 3NT on the ♥K lead.

What does the Rule of 7 say?

What does the Rule of Thinking say?

The Rule of 7 says to hold up twice (7-5).

In that case you would duck the ♥K and duck the next heart.

East would then shift to the ♦Q for down two.

The Rule of Thinking says that hearts are 6-2 (East opened 2♥).

Win the second heart (you know they are 6-2) and cross to dummy in clubs for the spade finesse. If the ♠K is wrong and East has the ♦A, it's not your day.

On this deal the Winning Play was to Hold up 1 time.

Let's try another:

	♠ 9 8 5 ♥ 4 ♦ K 9 8 ♣ Q J 10 9 8 3	
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Against 3NT, West leads the ♥6, fourth best. East plays the ♥Q.

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

What does the Rule of 7 say?

What does the Rule of Thinking say?

The Rule of 7 says to hold up 2 times (7-5).

This time the Rule of Thinking yields the same result.

You will have to knock out the ♣A.

There is no other suit you fear a shift to.

If hearts are 4-4, nothing will matter.

If hearts are 6-2, holding up once would suffice, but you have no way to know if they are 6-2.

Holding up twice (winning the third round) caters to this very common 5-3 split. East's ♥Q wins the first trick. You let the ♥10 hold the second trick. On the third heart, there is no benefit to holding up again (if they are 4-4, it won't matter). So, you win the third round of hearts and play clubs. If one defender has 5 hearts and the ♣A, there is nothing you can do about it. Here, the holdup play (twice) leads to 10 tricks.

[On this deal the Winning Play was to Hold up 2 times.](#)

One final try:

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

Playing matchpoints, you are in 3NT with the ♥K lead.

What does the Rule of 7 say?

What does the Rule of Thinking say?

The Rule of 7 says to hold up twice (7-5).

The Rule of Thinking says to hold up 3 times!

You have 9 top tricks. The only issue is how to try for an overtrick.

The obvious source for an overtrick is the diamond finesse--but is it safe to take it?

If you win an early heart and run your winners and then take the diamond finesse, the defense might set you by cashing too many hearts. You don't know they are 4-4. They could be 5-3.

If you win an early heart, you won't know the heart split. Even winning the third heart is not safe. What if West started with KQJ and East with 109xxx? Then when you take the diamond finesse, you risk defeat.

Why not hold up hearts (no shift will hurt) until the 4th round? Once you see they are 4-4, you can take the diamond finesse in complete safety.

[On this deal the Winning Play was to Hold up 3 times!](#)

There you have it. I always prefer thinking and logic to "rules." The Rule of 7 told you the wrong information nearly every time. With it, you would have robotically held up twice on each deal. In Real Life, the correct play was to hold up 0,1,2, and 3 times. This should put the Rule of 7 into "Rule Heaven." Maybe the "Rule Graveyard" is a better phrase.

[Bonus deal added 2019:](#)

Try this one, this time with spades the troublesome suit:

Playing matchpoints you wind up in 3NT after West overcalls 1♠. West leads the ♠K against 3NT.

	♠ 54 ♥ AQJ109 ♦ J8 ♣ J1092	
♠ KQJ82 ♥ 863 ♦ 54 ♣ K76		♠ 1097 ♥ 542 ♦ K76 ♣ Q843
	♠ A63 ♥ K7 ♦ AQ10932 ♣ A5	

What does the rule of 7 say? What does the rule of thinking say?

The rule of seven says hold up twice. The rule of thinking says don't hold up at all! The point of holding up is to create a safe hand. Here, you will need to take a diamond finesse eventually and it will have to go into West. If the finesse wins, you'll take 13 tricks, unless you made the phantom hold up play.

[On this deal the Winning Play was to Hold up 0 times.](#)

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