

Holding Up An Ace

Often when we play the hand we will have one or more aces. When we are playing in No Trumps, an ace is unique in that it will *always* win the trick in that suit. We know without a shadow of a doubt that we have one trick. If the ace sits alongside other smaller cards, we also have the ability to decide *when* we will win that trick. We can choose to let the defenders win the first trick or the first two tricks....This is known as **holding up an ace** where we allow a few rounds of the suit to be played before winning our ace.

Holding up an ace doesn't bring any extra tricks in itself, but it can be a useful strategy in the context of the whole hand. The principle advantage is that it exhausts holdings in one of the defenders' hands. That means, if they get in later, they won't be able to get to their partner's hand. Looking at a whole hand will make this idea a little clearer:

Holding up an Ace in No Trumps

Imagine we are playing the following hand in Three No Trumps. We will look at all four hands for convenience, but at the table it will be necessary to imagine the defenders' hands and picture how things *could* be.

Contract – Three No Trumps	♠ AJ2		
Opening Lead – Four of Hearts	♥ 75		
	♦ QJT5		
East plays the Jack of Hearts	♣ 975		
♠ T84		♠ 9763	
♥ KT943		♥ QJ6	
♦ 93		♦ A874	
♣ QT6		♣ J82	
	♠ KQ5		
	♥ A82		
	♦ K62		
	♣ AK43		

Since we are playing in No Trumps, we should begin by counting our tricks. We have three Spade tricks, one Heart tricks, no Diamond tricks (yet!) and two Club tricks. We need to find three additional tricks and the Diamond suit is the obvious place to look. After the defence have taken their Ace of Diamonds, our King-Queen-Jack-Ten will develop into the three missing tricks that we need.

Suppose we don't know about holding up. We will win the opening lead with our Ace of Hearts and then play a Diamond (likely the King of Diamonds, playing the honour from the short holding). East will win the Ace of Diamonds and play the Queen of Hearts (East playing the Three) and then the Six of Hearts to West's King, Ten and Nine of Hearts. The defence will have won one Diamond trick and four Heart tricks, leaving just eight for us and we will be one short.

After listening to this lecture, we will know *not* to win the first trick. Declarer should let the Jack of Hearts hold trick one. East will then play the Queen of Hearts and declarer should allow this to win also (playing low both times). When East continues with the Six of Hearts, Declarer will be forced to win the Ace (throwing the Five of Clubs away from dummy).

Look at the difference now when we play the King of Diamonds. East will win with the Ace and West will be poised with the King and Ten of Hearts. However, there will be no way to get to those winners. East no longer has any Hearts left and will have to play a Spade, a Club or a Diamond. Declarer will win that and now be able to cash all their tricks.

Aces in particular will win tricks eventually – don't be in a rush to win all your big cards early, especially in your short suits. Take the time to count your tricks first and when it comes to taking winners in the *defenders'* suits, consider holding up your winners to stop them from being able to move easily from one hand to the other.