Rule of 7

This mathematical rule is an aid to declarer to cut communications between the defenders when he plays in a no-trump contract. It is an attempt to minimize tricks taken by the opposition in declarer's weak suit.

If the declarer subtracts the total number of cards in the suit in his 'own hand and the dummy', from 7 (seven), the result is the number of times declarer should hold up with his Ace.

An example always helps:

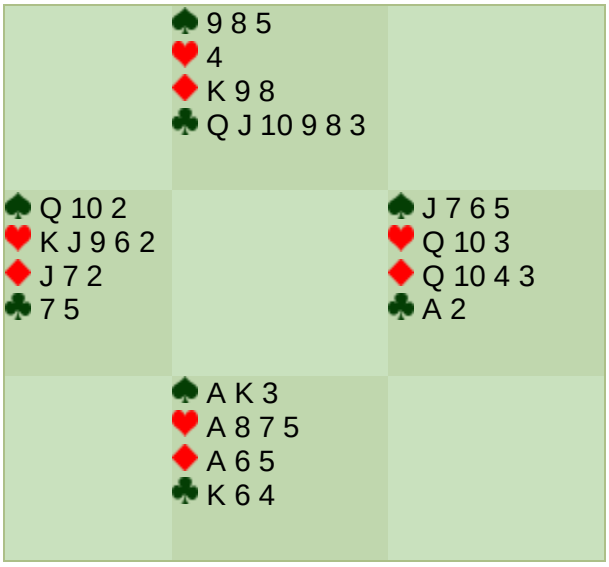
Declarer	Dummy
♥ A98	♥ 42

- Together declarer and dummy have 5 cards in ♥s.
- Declarer subtracts the number 5 from the special number 7, and
- 2 (two times) is the number of times declarer should hold up with his Ace, ie take the trick on the 3rd round.

In this example, you can see that there are 8 cards out in the defenders' hands. If they break 4-4 then there isn't a problem, the opposition will win three tricks. But what if they are split 5-3 or 6-2? If declarer were to win the first trick, then when the opposition win an outside trick they would take 4 or 5 ♥ tricks.

Hand examples:

Hand 1:



Against 3NT, West leads the ♥6, fourth best. East plays the ♥Q.

What does the *Rule of 7* say?

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

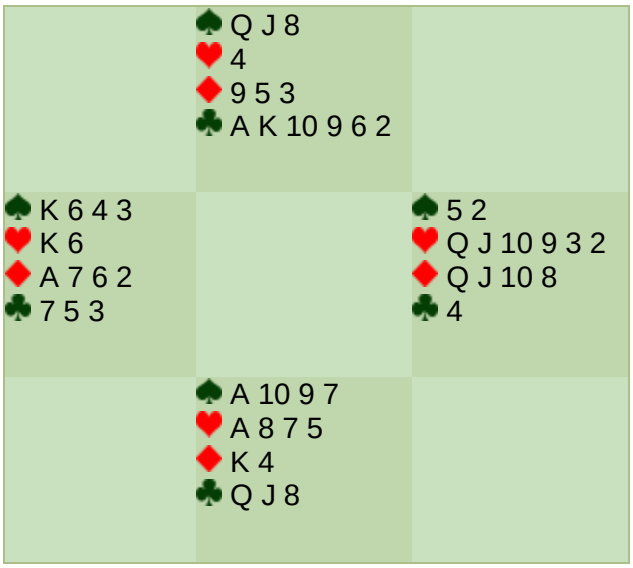
What does The *Rule of Logic* say?

- You will have to knock out the ♣A. and there is no other suit you fear a shift to.
- If ♥s are 4-4, nothing will matter.
- If ♥s 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. (Remember even number of outstanding cards usually split badly; more often than an odd number (47% for a 5-3 split, and 33% for a 4-4 split, and 17% for 6-2 split). East's ♥ Q wins the first trick. You let the ♥10 hold the second trick. On the third ♥, there is no benefit to holding up again (if they are 4-4, it won't matter). So, you win the third round of ♥s (7-5=2) and play ♣s. If one defender has 5 ♥s and the ♣A, there is nothing you can do about it. Here, the holdup play (twice) leads to 10 tricks because East doesn't have a ♥ to return.

On this deal the Winning Play was to 'hold up' 2 times (7-5).

Hand 2: Considering the Opposition's bids.



East opens 2♥ (Weak Two) and South reaches 3NT on the ♥K lead.

What does the *Rule of 7* say?

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

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

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

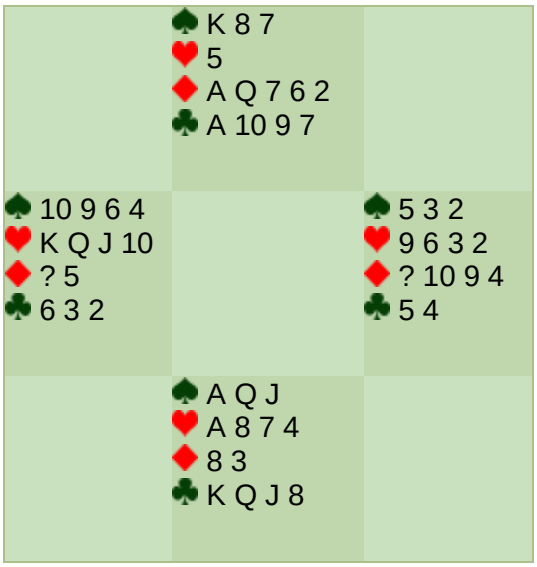
What does the *Rule of Logic* say?

- The *Rule of Logic* says that ♥s are 6-2 (East opened 2♥).

  Win the second ♥ (you know they are 6-2 AND you DON'T want a ♦D through your K4) and cross to dummy in ♣s for the ♠ 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 once (logical action – don't think that the Rule of 7 has to be followed blindly.

Hand 3:



Playing match-point pairs, you are in 3NT with the ♥K lead.

What does the Rule of 7 say?

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

What does the *Rule of Logic* say?

- The *Rule of Logic* 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 ♦ finesse, but is it safe to take it?

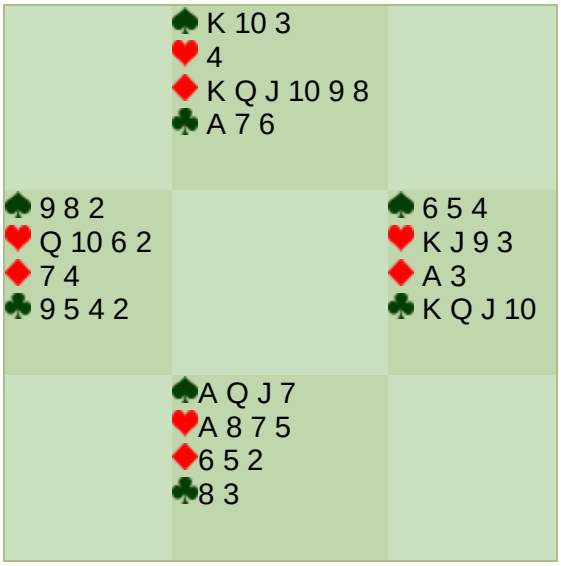
If you win an early ♥ and run your winners and then take the ♦ finesse, the defense might set you by cashing too many ♥s. You don't know they are 4-4. They could be 5-3.

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

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

On this deal the Winning Play was to 'hold up' 3 times!

Hand 4:



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

What does the Rule of 7 say?

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

What does the *Rule of Logic* say?

- The *Rule of Logic* says to win the first ♥ and don't hold up.

From the lead of the deuce (4th best), declarer knows the ♥s 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 ♣ and defeat the contract. Winning the first ♥ produces 9 tricks.

Conclusions

So, there you have it. Applying the *Rule of 7* can be very useful at cutting defender's communications but don't apply it as a god forsaken rule – use bridge sense.

I may have given **too** many examples against the use of this splendid rule, but rules are made to be broken when necessary. It is a very good rule to use alongside your bridge knowledge (especially when used with the *Rule of 11*).

One last example:

Example: Combining the Rule of 11 with the Rule of 7

West plays in a contract of 3NT. North leads ♠6, South putting in the ♠Q.

The *Rule of 11* shows that North has the A10. If you win with the king, North will have the A10 sitting over the J9. Now when you take the ♦ finesse, and it loses, your J9 will be swallowed up by the A10. North will then cash any other outstanding ♠s. However, when you refuse to accept the easy first trick (Rule of 7), it will be safe to take the ♦ finesse later on. If South has 3 ♠s, then the suit will split 4-3 and you will only lose 3 ♠ tricks. If North has 5 ♠s then South only has two, and when he gains the lead with the ♦ honour, he will not have any ♠s to play.

After ducking the ♠, you can play the jack on the second round. It does not matter whether North wins this trick or not, you have a ♠ stop. If he wins, he will not get back in until you have made your contract: (1 ♠, 2 ♥s, 4/5 ♦s and 2 ♣s). If North ducks and you take a losing ♦ finesse, the opposition will not be able to stop you making your contract. If South has a ♠ left to return, he has 3 ♠s and so North only has 4 ♠s. Therefore, the defence can take 3 ♠s and 1 ♦, and you have 9 tricks. If ♠s break 5-2 then South will not have a ♠ to return, hence you will again make your contract.