November 2026 Hand of the Month 103: Holding up

This month a hand from the random pairs.



Playing East you open 1♦, partner responds 1♠, and you rebid 1NT showing 15-17 points. Partner bids 3NT and the lead is Q♣



Counting winner you have 3 spades, 2 diamonds and a club. It will be straightforward to establish more winners heart and diamonds. The problem is in clubs- if South started with a 5 card club suit the defence will win 4 clubs and a heart.

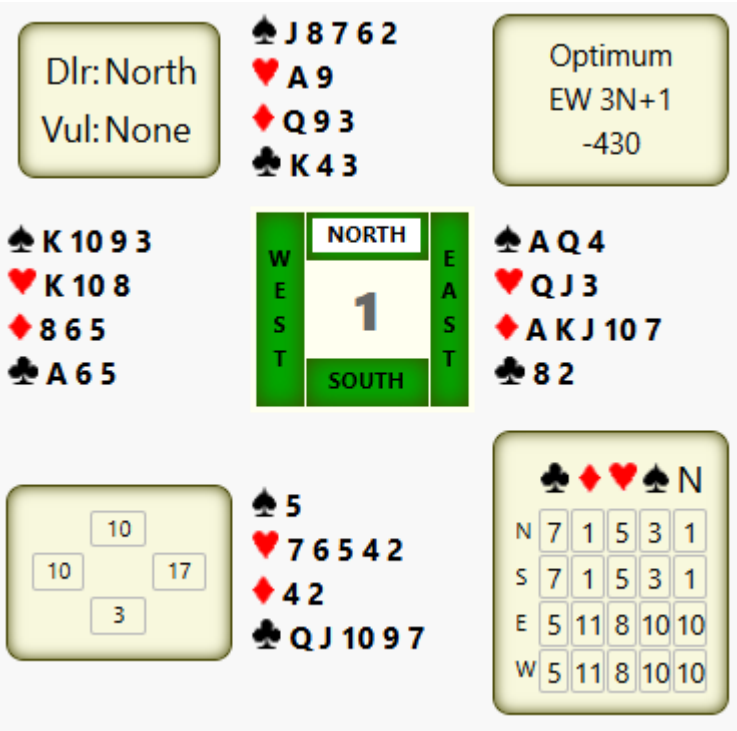
The key here is in disrupting the communication between the defence. If A♥ is with South there is nothing you can do, but it if it is with North then you need to make sure there is no entry back into Souths hand.

The obvious entry for South is in the club suit so you need to avoid winning the trick immediately. If the suit is breaking 5-3 then if you duck the first 2 rounds of clubs and win A♣ on the 3rd round then North will have no clubs left to lead when they get in.

If you are not sure how many times you have to duck the general rule is that you add the number of cards in the suit and take this from 7. This is known as ‘the rule of 7’.

In this case you have 5 clubs between the East & West hands. 7-5=2, so you duck twice.

The full hand:



West wins the 3rd round of clubs and leads a low heart. North can see that they will not have a good lead if they duck the heart- the spade and diamond are both leading into finesses, so the best play is to win A♥ immediately and lead back another heart.

East will now be forced to take the diamond finesse at some point. The best play is to take A♦ just in case the Q♦ is singleton, then cross to table to take the finesse. This holds and declarer makes 10 tricks.

On the night 5 declarers were in NT, all got a club lead but only 1 made 10 tricks.