

BIDDING STOPPERS FOR NO TRUMP GAMES

By Maritha Pottenger

Because 9 tricks in 3NT are often easier to come to than 11 tricks in a minor-suit game, you and your partner should consistently explore for a NT game once you have found a fit in a minor suit. And, if a major fit is not available, you need to be able to show stoppers to find 3NT game. The general “rules” for guidance are:

- 1) Showing major-suit stoppers is most important. (When you are bidding minors, the opponents are most likely to lead a major.)
- 2) When two or three suits need stoppers, you bid cheapest stopper that you *have*. (“**Two Tells!**”)
- 3) When only one suit needs a stopper, you bid NT if you have a stopper, you cue-bid that suit if you *do not have* a stopper (asking partner to bid NT with a stopper). When opponents overcall, bidding that suit ASKS.
- 4) If you are showing a stopper, it must be fairly safe (as it may be led through on the opening lead). A “fairly safe” stopper could be Ax(x)(x); Kxx(x); K10x; QJx(x) or even (if you are desperate) J109x.
- 5) When all stoppers in all suits except for one have been bid or implied, a bid of that suit can be used to show a partial stopper—asking partner to bid NT if s/he also has a partial stopper. Partial stoppers are holdings such as Jxx; Qx or 10xxx (if an opponent has bid that suit). If opponent has NOT bid the suit, 10xxx is considered a regular stopper.

Sample auctions would include:

1) a minor opening followed by a limit raise of that minor

1C-P-3C (you & your partner have established a minor-suit fit and 3C absolutely denies any 4-card major). At this point, 3D shows a diamond stopper. An immediate 3H shows a heart stopper. An immediate 3S shows a spade stopper. It would be possible to have this sequence: 1C-P-3C-P-3D-P-3H-P-3NT.

Similarly, after 1D-P-3D, (or 1D-P-2D: inverted), new bids should be showing stoppers to invite 3NT.

2) a major opening followed by a two-over-one bid.

1H-P-2D-P-3C. Partner may or may not have four clubs, but certainly has a club stopper. If you have a good spade stopper, bid 3NT. If you have help in clubs or hearts along with your diamonds and 13 or more HCP, bid 3S—asking partner to bid 3NT with the spade stopper. (You might have ½ spade stopper, but partner cannot depend on that.) If you have only 10 points (Standard American) and no spade stopper, but two hearts, go back to 3H. If you have only 10 points, no spade stopper and only 1 heart, but 6 diamonds, rebid your diamonds.

3) when the opponents overcall

1D-1S-2S by partner. Partner either has a limit raise in diamonds or a good hand without 4 hearts (no negative double) and no clear bid. Bid 2NT if you have a spade stopper. If you lack a spade stopper, but like your hand, show another 4-card suit. If you have ½ a spade stopper, bid 3S. Returning to diamonds is your default bid.

1D-P-2C-2H-2S. Partner has a spade stopper (you are extremely unlikely to have 4 spades on this auction) with a good hand, and is looking for NT. If you now bid 3H, you are showing a **partial stopper** in hearts and asking partner to bid 3NT if s/he also has a partial stopper. If you do NOT have a partial stopper, you must return to your minor or your partner’s minor. If partner had the heart stopper, s/he should bid NT immediately. (Don't worry about spades. Opponents will usually lead hearts & your partner should have spades covered.)

4) when opponents make a two-suited overcall

1D-2NT (showing clubs & hearts): If you bid 3C at this point, you are probably showing a club stopper and inviting 3NT. If you bid 3H, you are probably showing a heart stopper and inviting 3NT. If you have both stopped, just bid 3NT with an opening hand. 1H-2H (showing spades and a minor)-2S should be cue-bid (of the KNOWN suit) showing a limit raise in hearts. If partner has good stuff in both minor suits, can make a negative double. Partner might choose to bid one of the minors which would guarantee a stopper in that minor. If Opener has a spade stopper and a stopper in the other minor, can bid 3NT.