

Finding stoppers for 3NT

There are many situations where you feel no-trumps is the right contract but are concerned about having stops in a particular suit.

In this particular example South has club support from partner and with game going values needs to be in 3NT or 5C. Clearly 3NT will be easier to make (just 9 tricks versus 11) but South has no heart stopper. After receiving club support South bids 3D. This is 100% forcing (new suit at the 3 level) and shows diamond values, inviting North to bid NT with stop(s) in the unbid suit (hearts).

	North	
	AJ1086	
	K10	
	96	
	A843	
West		East
Q952		K3
Q85		AJ743
Q107543		82
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	South	
	74	
	962	
	AKJ	
	KQ975	

Dealer North Love all

West	North	East	South
	1S	Pass	2C
Pass	3C	Pass	3D
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

East makes the standard lead of the 4H, being 4th highest of best (and unbid) suit.

Winning with the KH North can see a likely nine tricks and with the hearts now wide open must cash out before the defence regains the lead. When a contract looks easy, ask yourself what could go wrong. Here a 4-0 club break although unlikely (10%) could make life difficult. Just in case you should plan for such a case. Clearly if West has four clubs, you will be powerless to prevent the opposition making a club trick. However if East has four clubs the J10 can be picked up by leading up to dummy. Thus the play is AC first to reveal the bad break, followed by a small club forcing East to split their honours, otherwise declarer will win with the 9. Back to hand with AS and repeat the club play. Note if KC is played first, revealing the bad break, it is too late to prevent East from winning a club trick.

If East starts with a diamond lead, declarer must eschew the finesse, keeping West, the danger hand, off lead. A heart switch from West is disastrous. Winning the AD, a club to the A reveals the bad break and after winning the second club in dummy declarer plays to the JS which loses to the K. Winning the second diamond, declarer must now hope for split spade honours and finesse through West's QS to make 2 spades, 2 diamonds and 5 clubs.