

Got Stoppers? Do Tell!

Opponents do love interfering with our auctions. Although this interference can cause complications, it also creates opportunities. Use the opponents' interference to find the optimum contract for your side, whether it be a no trump contract or a suit contract. Don't forget that the best contract for your side may be defending the opponents' contract ... doubled.

The following points to consider when deciding whether or not to play in a no trump contract were presented in Part One of this series. They are still important in determining the appropriate contract in competitive auctions, but note the additional complications.

- How many tricks is your long suit, or partner's long suit, likely to generate in a no trump contract? The fewer tricks the long suits will yield, the less likely it is that no trump will be successful.
- How many times must you lose the lead to set up your long suit in a no trump contract? The more times you lose the lead, the more likely it is that a no trump contract will fail. ***The opponents know the correct suit to attack. Will you have time to set up your long suit?***
- How good is the transportation between the two hands? The more cards you have in partner's long suit, the more likely it is that a no trump contract will be successful – assuming outside suit stoppers, of course. With few cards in partner's long suit, a successful no trump contract may depend on good side suit transportation.
- What do your stoppers look like? An ace will stop a suit only one time, and it accounts for a considerable part of a hand's high card points. JT9x will do the same job, leaving your hand full of tricks in other suits. ***The opponents know the correct suit to attack. Will the opening lead come up to, or through, your holding in the opponents' suit?***

The Western Cue Bid

One of the most valuable tools in any competitive auction is the cue bid of the opponents' suit. The *Western cue bid*, stated simply, is the three-level bid of the opponents' suit, and **it asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in that suit**. Without a stopper in the opponents' suit, the partner makes the best descriptive bid possible. Of course, the Western cue bid is forcing for one round. ☺ The principles underlying the use of this tool can be determined by examining a few cue bid auctions.

AUCTION 1.

1H – 1S – **2S** – Pass //

- This can't be a Western cue bid, since it's not a three-level bid. What does this simple cue bid of overcaller's suit show? It implies a limit raise in opener's suit, and opener will bid accordingly. Responder's hand may have a limit raise, or game-forcing values and trump support, or even a strong hand with slam interest and a suit of its own.

AUCTION 2.

1H – 1S – **3S** – Pass //

- This is a three-level cue bid of the opponents' suit, but is it a Western cue? If you and your partner have agreed to play splinter bids, most of them are still in effect in competitive auctions. This cue bid is actually a splinter bid, showing four or more trumps (hearts), at least game-forcing values, and a singleton or void in spades. If you and your partner have not agreed to play splinter bids, the meaning of the 3S bid in this auction is definitely undiscussed!

AUCTION 3.

1H – 1S – 2C – Pass // 3C – Pass – **3S** – Pass //

- This is a classic Western cue bid auction. Opener has shown an opening hand with at least five hearts and three-card or better club support. Responder has shown at least ten high card points (HCPs), probably at least four clubs, and interest in a no trump game contract, *if opener can provide a stopper in spades, the overcaller's suit*. Which one of these example **responder hands** best fits this auction?

Example 1: ♠763 ♥T7 ♦KQT3 ♣AQ876

Example 2: ♠QT4 ♥86 ♦QJT ♣AKT87
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Example 3: ♠85 ♥J6 ♦AT3 ♣AKT762
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Example 4: ♠76 ♥AT5 ♦T3 ♣AQJT6

1. In addition to a spade stopper, what does opener need for the partnership to take nine tricks in no trump with the Example 1 hand? The ♣K and three-card club support would provide five likely club tricks. Add at least the top three hearts and a sure trick in the opponent's suit, and nine tricks are there. Watch out, though, if anything goes wrong! Would 3NT be a good contract if opener's hand looks like this? ♠A94 ♥AQJ32 ♦97 ♣JT5. Also note that a 2C response is not wrong with this example hand, but a negative double might be more descriptive.
2. Why not bid no trump yourself with the Example 2 hand? You have a spade stopper, and you want the lead to come up to you.
3. If you chose Example 3, good for you! Given partner's support for your good six-card club suit, your hand is likely to produce seven tricks. With a spade stopper and likely heart tricks in opener's hand, 3NT should be a great contract.
4. When partner opened the bidding 1H, you always planned to get to a 4H contract. Don't confuse the issue.

AUCTION 4.

1S – 2C – 2D – Pass // 3C

- Like Auction 3, opener's 3C cue bid is a Western cue. Opener has interest in a no trump game contract, *if responder can provide a stopper in spades, the overcaller's suit*. Which one of these example **opener hands** best fits this auction?

Example 1: ♠AKQ762 ♥KT74 ♦3 ♣T2
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Example 2: ♠AJT93 ♥AQJ62 ♦62 ♣7
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Example 3: ♠KQJT5 ♥QJ4 ♦T5 ♣AT8
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Example 4: ♠AQJ84 ♥AQT ♦KQ3 ♣76
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1. With the Example 1 hand, opener would rebid the great spade suit. A 2H rebid is possible, but partner did not make a negative double, so there is no eight-card heart fit.
2. With the Example 2 hand, opener's first rebid would be the good five-card heart suit. This hand is not interested in no trump at all.

3. This hand is best described with a 2NT rebid, not a Western cue bid. This is a minimum opening hand with both hearts and clubs stopped. After partner's 2D bid, 2NT is the perfect description.
4. With 18 HCPs, five spades, nice hearts, and great diamond support, all this hand needs is a major suit card, ♦Axxxx, and a club stopper in responder's hand for no trump to be successful. If responder denies a club stopper, 6D may be a great contract. Partner's response to the Western cue bid should give opener all the information necessary to identify the correct strain. Did you pick Example 4?

Elements Common to Hands Making a Western Cue Bid

- The partnership has shown game-going values, but no major suit fit.
- The hand has a source of tricks, usually a long minor suit; *or*
- The hand has a major suit, usually only five cards in length, and extra values.
- The hand has good stoppers in the unbid suit. Remember that if no trump is the final contract, the lead will be going *through* this hand, possibly in this unbid suit.
- The hand does not have adequate stoppers in the opponents' suit.

The Opponents Bid Two Suits

When the opponents bid two suits, your side has two cue bids possible. The standard method used to find or avoid a no trump contract in this situation is to **cue bid the suit in which you hold a stopper**. Effectively, you tell partner, "A no trump contract may be possible. I have a stopper in this suit. Do you have a stopper in the opponents' other suit?" With a stopper, partner will bid no trump. Without a stopper, partner will make the best descriptive bid possible. Take a look at these auctions.

AUCTION 1.

1D – 1H – 1S – Pass // 2D – 3C – 3D – Pass // **3H**

- In this auction, opener has cue bid the opponent's first bid suit, hearts. Opener is *showing a heart stopper* and asking partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in clubs, the opponents' second suit. Opener's diamond suit must be a good source of tricks; opener's heart stoppers are good enough to survive the lead going through them; and opener feels that a 3S contract or a 4D contract will not be disastrous if responder denies a club stopper.

AUCTION 2.

1D – 1H – 1S – 2C // 2D – Pass – **3C** – Pass //

- This situation is a little scary, since both opponents are bidding. Responder's 3C bid *shows a club stopper* and asks partner to bid 3NT with a heart stopper. Responder's clubs are good enough to survive the lead going through them, and responder has at least game-invitational values and probably a fit and/or fillers for opener's diamond suit. Could responder have five spades in this auction?

Jazzing Things Up: The Opponents Make a Two-Suited Bid

Modern bidding includes several methods to show two suits in competitive auctions. Michaels cue bids, top and bottom cue bids, and unusual no trump overcalls are common examples. ***Defending against these methods accurately requires partnership discussion and agreement!*** The specific

methods you and your partner decide to play are not as important as the fact that you have agreed on those methods. How would you and your favorite partner read these auctions?

AUCTION 1.

1D – 2D (Michaels) – **2H**

Obviously, partner doesn't really want to play in one of overcaller's major suits. Therefore, the 2H bid is an *invisible cue bid*. What does it mean?

1. Do you and your partner play *Unusual over Michaels*? If so, does this cue bid of the opponent's lower-ranking suit show at least game invitational and five-plus clubs? Or does it show at least a limit raise in diamonds, opener's suit?
2. Have you and your partner agreed to use the lower-ranking cue bid to show limit raise values in opener's suit and the higher-ranking cue bid to show game-forcing values?
3. If neither of these appeal to you and partner, use these invisible cue bids to search for no trump contracts. Since the Michaels cue bid has shown two suits, the 2H invisible cue bid *shows a stopper* in that suit and asks partner to bid no trump with a stopper in the opponent's other suit.

AUCTION 2.

1D – 2NT – **3H**

. You look at the opponents' convention card and discover that this 2NT overcall shows the two lowest unbid suits, in this auction, hearts and clubs. Partner cannot want to play in one of the opponent's two suits, so this is an *invisible cue bid*.

1. Do you and your partner play *Unusual over Unusual*? If so, does this cue bid of the opponent's higher-ranking suit show at least game invitational and five-plus spades? Or does it show at least a limit raise in diamonds, opener's suit?
2. Have you and your partner agreed to use the lower-ranking cue bid to show limit raise values in opener's suit and the higher-ranking cue bid to show game-forcing values?
3. If neither of these appeal to you and partner, use these invisible cue bids to search for no trump contracts. Since the Unusual 2NT bid has shown two suits, the 3H invisible cue bid *shows a stopper* in that suit and asks partner to bid no trump with a stopper in the opponent's other suit, clubs in this auction.

AUCTION 3.

1H – 2H (Michaels) – ?

. After a major suit opening, the Michaels cue bid shows the other major and a minor suit. Unfortunately, you don't know that minor suit. There are several methods to handle this situation. Here is one possibility.

1. At responder's first turn to bid, only one suit is known. Use the cue bid of that suit to show limit raise or better values for partner's opening major suit. In competitive auctions, identifying a major suit fit should take precedence.
2. A no trump response shows at least game-invitational values, denies a fit for opener's major, guarantees a stopper in the opponent's known suit, and suggests probable stoppers in both minor suits.

3. A double by responder shows at least game-invitational values, tends to deny a fit for opener's major, and tends to deny stoppers in the opponent's major suit. More information is necessary to determine the best action. Assuming opener passes:
 - a. A double is for penalties in the suit the opponents have chosen. Keep in mind the vulnerability when choosing between a playing no trump contract and penalizing the opponents.
 - b. 3NT shows game values and a stopper in the suit the opponents have chosen.
 - c. A delayed cue bid of the opponent's major suit shows game-forcing values, denies a stopper in the suit the opponents have chosen, and asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in that suit.
 - d. A new suit bid shows five-plus cards in that suit and is game-forcing.
 - e. If RHO makes a rebid, a pass is forcing. It suggests defending, if partner can double.
4. All other immediate bids by responder, even in new suits, deny game-invitational values.

Match Each Responder's Hand with the Appropriate Auction

Hand 1:
 ♠76
 ♥T7
 ♦KQJ763
 ♣T92

Auction A:
 1H – 2H – 2S – Pass
 3H – Pass – 4H – Pass
 Pass - Pass

Hand 2:
 ♠A6
 ♥KT74
 ♦QJT3
 ♣K52

Auction B:
 1H – 2H – 3NT – Pass
 Pass – Pass

Hand 3:
 ♠AT2
 ♥K4
 ♦AQT97
 ♣T52

Auction C:
 1H – 2H – X – 2S
 Pass – Pass – 3D – Pass
 3NT – Pass – Pass – Pass

Hand 4:
 ♠A6
 ♥83
 ♦AKQ763
 ♣Q95

Auction D:
 1H – 2H – X – 2NT
 Pass – 3C – 3S – Pass
 3NT – Pass – Pass – Pass

Hand 5:
 ♠763
 ♥KT
 ♦AQT86
 ♣A32

Auction E:
 1H – 2H – 3D! – Pass
 Pass – Pass

1

♠ K9654
 ♥ Q3
 ♦ Q82
 ♣ AQ4
 ♠ A1073
 ♥ KJ972
 ♦ J5
 ♣ K3
 ♠ J2
 ♥ 10864
 ♦ 103
 ♣ J8752
 ♠ Q8
 ♥ A5
 ♦ AK9764
 ♣ 1096

Dealer: North
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦
2 ♥	3 ♦	Pass	3 NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

If the 2D bid by South is game-forcing, North could bid 3H at his first rebid, asking partner to bid 3NT with a heart stopper. Pros: No great rebid and Qxx in diamonds to help partner. Cons: Bad spade suit and no extra values.

<-Makeable contracts->

	C	D	H	S	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	5	-	3	3
S	-	5	-	5	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

2

♠ J109
 ♥ 9764
 ♦ J2
 ♣ J1092
 ♠ 832
 ♥ 82
 ♦ A87
 ♣ AKQ65
 ♠ A7
 ♥ AKQ105
 ♦ 963
 ♣ 843
 ♠ KQ654
 ♥ J3
 ♦ KQ1054
 ♣ 7

Dealer: East
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1 ♥	2 ♥
Dbl	2 ♠	Pass	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Isn't this a pretty auction?

<-Makeable contracts->

	C	D	H	S	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	5	-	5	-	4
W	5	-	5	-	4

3

♠ 1085
 ♥ KQ82
 ♦ A1064
 ♣ Q5
 ♠ AQJ43
 ♥ 76
 ♦ K975
 ♣ 82
 ♠ K97
 ♥ J543
 ♦ Q832
 ♣ 76
 ♠ 62
 ♥ A109
 ♦ J
 ♣ AKJ10943

Dealer: South
E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1 ♣
1 ♠	Dbl	2 ♠	3 ♣
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	5 ♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

South has no spade stopper, so must find the best descriptive bid. 4H, 4C, and 5C are possibilities. South has already denied four hearts, so this bid suggests playing in the Moysian. The auction suggests hearts might not break, so North can correct to 5C. If you see all the cards, you can take 11 tricks in hearts, too.

<-Makeable contracts->

	C	D	H	S	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	5	-	5	-	2
S	5	-	5	-	2
E	-	1	-	-	-
W	-	1	-	-	-

4

♠ AQ763
 ♥ K10872
 ♦
 ♣ J86
 ♠ KJ105
 ♥ 94
 ♦ AK953
 ♣ Q9
 ♠ 8
 ♥ AJ6
 ♦ Q762
 ♣ AK754
 ♠ 942
 ♥ Q53
 ♦ J1084
 ♣ 1032

Dealer: West
Both Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	2 ♦	2 ♥	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	3 ♣	Pass
3 ♦	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
6 ♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

Anything could happen on this hand. The major point to understand: Do you and partner have an agreement on the meaning of East's 2H invisible cue bid?

<-Makeable contracts->

	C	D	H	S	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	6	-	-	5
W	5	6	-	-	5