

372. What constitutes a stopper?

By Ron Klinger

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			Pass
2♥ ⁽¹⁾	Dble ⁽²⁾	Pass	3♥ ⁽³⁾
Pass	?		

(1) Six hearts, 6-10 points

(2) For takeout

(3) Maximum pass

What would you do as North with:

♠ KQ
♥ Q9
♦ AK1063
♣ AQJ4

Make up your mind before reading further.

This was yesterday's puzzle:

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			Pass
2♥ ⁽¹⁾	Dble ⁽²⁾	Pass	?

(1) Six hearts, 6-10 points

(2) For takeout

What would you do as South with:

♠ AJ84
♥ 64
♦ Q972
♣ K83

You have 10 HCP, plus a doubleton, and 4 spades. That looks like a sound jump to 3♠. Some play that if it goes 2♥ : Double : Pass : 2NT (Lebensohl puppet to 3♠), Pass : 3♣ : Pass : 3♠, this shows spades plus a stopper in hearts. If it goes 2♥ : Double : Pass : 3♠, this shows spades and denies a stopper in hearts. The hand qualifies for the immediate 3♠ bid if you are playing the Lebensohl 2NT Convention.

If South had bid 3♠, what should North do with the 21-point hand above? Would 4♦ be forcing? I would think so. If North does not have support for spades, North must have a very strong hand to have chosen a takeout double. What would a bid of 4♥ over 3♠ mean? It would be fine if it says, 'Pick a game'. South could then bid 4♠ with 5+ spades, 5♣ with 4+ clubs and 5♦ with 4+ diamonds (the actual hand). If South had a 4-3-3-3 pattern, South should bid 4NT over 4♥ and hope that North takes that as bid your longer minor rather than as an offer to play in 4NT.

When the hand arose, South bid 3♥ in reply to the takeout double. That showed a maximum pass and South hoped North would bid 3♠ with 4 spades, 3NT with a heart stopper or 4-minor with 5+ cards in that minor. If playing Lebensohl 2NT, 3♥ denies 4 spades and denies a stopper in hearts. This North-South pair were not playing Lebensohl and North took 3♥ simply as a maximum passed hand. North rebid 3NT and all passed.

A holding of Q-x often operates as a stopper or a second stopper. It can be very useful opposite A-x-x or K-x-x. Opposite J-x-x, Q-x produces a combined stopper. There can even be a stopper with Q-x opposite 10-x-x if the partner of the weak-two opener has J-x or K-J or A-J. This was not one of those days, as this was the full deal:

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ KQ	
	♥ Q9	
	♦ AK1063	
	♣ AQJ4	
West		East
♠ 105		♠ 97632
♥ AK10853		♥ J72
♦ J4		♦ 85
♣ 752		♣ 1096
	South	
	♠ AJ84	
	♥ 64	
	♦ Q972	
	♣ K83	

The ♥2 is the normal lead against North's 3NT. When West plays ♥K and then ♥A, East unblocks the ♥J and West takes six tricks. East actually led the ♥J. West did not duck this, but played ♥A ♥K and four more heart tricks. That was two down, North-South -100 and 8.2 Imps to East-West.

No other pair played in 3NT. One was in 6♠, -100, also -8.2 Imps. One was one down, -50, -6.9 Imps, in 4♠. The auction had been Pass : 2♥ : Double : Pass, 3♠ : Pass : 4♠, all pass.

Some played in a part-score, for example: Pass: 2♥ : Double : Pass, 2♠ : Pass : 3♦, all pass, +150, -2.3 Imps and Pass : 2♥ : Double : Pass : 2♠, Pass : 3♥ (very strong hand) : Pass : 4♦, all pass, +150 -2.3 Imps. Apparently not everyone treats 4♦ as forcing in this auction.

The most popular contract was 5♦, making 11 tricks, +400 and +3.9 Imps.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer North : Nil vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1NT - 15-17
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ 106
♥ A84
♦ Q1094
♣ A975

If you have 2♣ 5-card major Stayman available, it goes 1NT : 2♣, 2♦ (no 5-card major). Now what?

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

If at first you don't succeed, you belong to the vast majority.