



August Boehm

# Boehm on Bridge

## 3NT in depth — part 2: stoppers

**Bridge Professor:** To reach good 3NT contracts, we need a good tool box. Among the most helpful is the stopper cuebid.

**Sally Fourth:** Why do you call it that?

**Professor:** A cuebid names a suit you do not wish to be trumps. There are many types of cuebids: control cuebids to explore slam, support cuebids in competitive sequences, two-suited cuebids like Michaels and so forth. That's the reason to add a modifier — terminology should be clarifying, not confusing.

**Sally:** With so many cuebids flying around, it's quite easy to get mixed up.

**Professor:** The stopper cuebid occurs below 3NT, sometimes at the two level but usually at the three level. Another precondition is that the preceding auction excludes a proven eight-card major suit fit. If a fit has been established, it's in a minor suit

**Sally:** Whoa. Let's have some examples.

**Professor:** Consider this pairing:

(A)	Opener	Responder
	1♥	1♠
	2♣	3♣
	3♦	

(B)	Opener	Responder
	1♠	2♣
	2♠	3♣
	3♦	

Before opener bids 3♦, there is one unbid suit — diamonds — in (A). There are two unbid suits — diamonds and hearts — in (B).

Below 3NT, when there is one unbid suit, the cuebid of that suit asks for a stopper; when there are two (or three) unbid suits, the cuebid tells of a stopper.

One = Asks (vowels); Two (or Three) = Tells ("T").

In (A), if opener holds a hand suitable for notrump including a diamond guard, he bids 3NT.

In (B), if opener has both unbid suits stopped, he bids 3NT; with neither stopped, he avoids notrump. It's when opener has one suit stopped that it's important to explore for 3NT by announcing the stopper's location. If partner can stop the other unbid suit, he grabs the notrump.

**Sally:** What does partner do when he can't stop the unbid suit?

**Professor:** Often he retreats to a known fit, but there is one other tool available before bypassing 3NT — the half-stopper cuebid.

**Sally:** You must be kidding.

**Professor:** It's not so hard. Let's extend sequence (B):

(B)	Opener	Responder
	1♠	2♣
	2♠	3♣
	3♦	3♥

What sort of heart holding might responder have?

**Sally:** I don't know.

**Professor:** Does opener have a heart guard? Follow the logic trail.

**Sally:** Opener announced a diamond stopper with 3♦ — Two=Tells. If opener also held a heart stopper, he would have bid 3NT himself.

**Professor:** If responder held a heart stopper, he would do the same. Knowing that opener lacks a full heart stopper, responder keeps 3NT in view. Why? He must have

prospects for 3NT.

**Sally:** You've lost me.

**Professor:** Responder holds a half-stopper in hearts, the suit he is cuebidding. A half-stopper is commonly Q-x or J-x-x. Combine the two halves and you have a whole stopper.

**Sally:** That's pretty clever. So, if partner shows a half-stopper, I bid 3NT with the missing half, else I head toward some other contract.

**Professor:** Yes, Try this example:

♠94 ♥AQ9742 ♦K83 ♣AQ.

You open 1♥, partner responds 2♣, you rebid 2♥, partner rebids 3♣. Your call?

**Sally:** If partner stops spades, I want to be in 3NT. With two unbid suits, I'll tell partner of my diamond stopper by bidding 3♦.

**Professor:** Next example:

♠A ♥KQ764 ♦982 ♣AQ103.

You open 1♥, partner responds 1♠, you rebid 2♣, partner raises to 3♣. What next?

**Sally:** I guess here's where I explore for 3NT. Diamonds is the one unbid suit, so 3♦ is supposed to ask for a diamond stopper.

**Professor:** You hold:

♠Q2 ♥AK875 ♦83 ♣A1083.

Again you open 1♥, partner responds 2♣, you raise to 3♣, partner bids 3♦. What now?

**Sally:** When partner bid 3♦, there were two unbid suits, so his 3♦ was telling. I could gamble 3NT with my spade holding; if they don't run the spades, I like my chances.

**Professor:** It's true that opening leader will rarely hold long, strong spades because he didn't overcall. But if partner holds no spade help, down we go.

This is not the spot for a 3NT gamble because there is a solution — the half-stopper cuebid of 3♠.

You already denied a full spade stopper by not choosing 3NT the previous round, and partner has at most a half spade stopper by the same reasoning. With no spade help, you would both avoid 3NT. □