

Notrump Contract Play ~ When to Take Winner (Stopper!)

What is a stopper? Well, to put it bluntly, it's a winner!!!!!!!!!! Perhaps you are playing and have only one stopper in a suit. When do you take that stopper????? **NEVER** take an ace (if it's your only stopper) on the first trick unless you can count enough winners to make your contract!!!! Let's review: What is a winner? Yes, it's an Ace, Ace/King, or Ace/King/Queen. Having a King/Queen/Jack looks really good, but you must give up the lead to establish the suit!!!

The definition of a stopper is "a holding that will, most likely, keep the opponents from immediately running a suit in a notrump contract." Playing in Notrump, having Qxx in the opponent's suit may be a stopper.

Does it matter when you take your stopper? **ABSOLUTELY!!!!** Let's look at an example: You are South and playing in 3 NT. West leads K ♠

North Hand
♠ 8 7
♥ K 6
♦ K Q 10 7 2
♣ A J 6 4

South Hand
♠ A 6 3
♥ A 5 4
♦ J 4 3
♣ K 8 3 2

Before playing to trick one, let's count winners between the two hands:

How many winners do you have in spades? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in hearts? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in diamonds? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in clubs? _____ Which cards? _____

Total number of winners? _____

Which suit looks the best to develop? _____ Why? _____

How do you develop that suit? _____

How many times do you hold up playing your Ace? _____

NOTE: If you play the ace on the first trick, you will go set 100% of the time!!!!!!!!!! So, how can you avoid going set????? Don't take the first trick!!! What do you know? First, the lead of the king **PROMISES** the queen!!! Did you know that????? When West leads the Queen, what do you know????? Yes, she has the Jack!!!! Duck the queen!!! Wait until she leads another spade!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Why????????????? You want to be sure that her partner (East) is out of spades. What if she isn't????? Then West only started with four spades!!! Yep!! You can count!!!!!!

Now you can give up the lead with the ace of diamonds to set up the suit and you've made your contract!!!!

Let's talk about the **RULE OF SEVEN!!!!!!!!!!**

So if your stopper is the ace, when do you take it????????? As Declarer, add the number of cards in the suit led that you have you and dummy have. Subtract from seven. Your answer will tell you how long to hold up!!!! In the problem above, you have only two spades and dummy has three. $2 + 3 = 5$. Subtract 5 from 7 and you hold up two times then take your ace!!!! Yes, I know that at this point you had no choice, but you get the idea!!!!

Okay, that's a great idea, but what about king or queen stoppers???? If you can safely hold up, you can follow the Rule of 7; otherwise, you must take your stopper when you can.

Let's do some examples and decide when to take your stoppers!!!!

Hand # 1 Contract is 3 NT and the opening lead is Q ♣ (Leading from O J 10 sequence)
Hint: Because West is leading from a sequence does not mean she only has three!

North Hand
♠ K 9 2
♥ Q 10 3
♦ A K J 6 5
♣ 9 6

South Hand
♠ A 8 6 5
♥ K J 8 2
♦ Q 8
♣ A 7 5

Now let's count winners between the two hands:

How many winners do you have in spades? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in hearts? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in diamonds? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in clubs? _____ Which cards? _____

Total number of winners? _____

Which suit looks the best to develop? _____ Why? _____

How do you develop that suit? _____

How many times do you hold up playing your Ace? _____

Hand # 2

Contract is 3 NT and the opening lead is K ♥ (Leading from K Q J sequence)

Hint: Because West is leading from a sequence does not mean she only has three!

North Hand
♠ K J 7 6
♥ 9 6 4
♦ A Q 4 3 2
♣ A

South Hand
♠ Q 10 3
♥ A 8 7
♦ K 9 6
♣ K 8 6 3

Now let's count winners between the two hands:

How many winners do you have in spades? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in hearts? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in diamonds? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in clubs? _____ Which cards? _____

Total number of winners? _____

Which suit looks the best to develop? _____ Why? _____

How do you develop that suit? _____

How many times do you hold up playing your Ace? _____

Hint: Don't get hung up with lots of Rules!!! The Rule of 20; the Rule of 22; the Rule of 11; the Rule of 15, etc.!!!!!!! No, don't ask me to explain all these. Right now as newer bridge players concentrate on what will help you the most. In declaring notrump, the Rule of Seven will help you more than you can imagine!!! Why? Because it helps you analyze the hand and decide the best time to take your winner!!!!!! OR stopper!!!!

Hand # 3

Contract is 3 NT and the opening lead is Q ♠ (Leading from Q J 10 sequence)
 East overtakes with the Ace and returns a spade. Why? How many spades does
 West have???? _____

Hint: Count the number of spades in your hand and in Dummy and add the
 number of spades in the East Hand!!!!!!!

North Hand
♠ 7 3
♥ A J 8 7
♦ A K 9 6 4
♣ 9 2

South Hand
♠ K 8 6
♥ K 6 4
♦ 5
♣ K Q J 10 7 3

Now let's count winners between the two hands:

How many winners do you have in spades? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in hearts? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in diamonds? _____ Which cards? _____

How many winners do you have in clubs? _____ Which cards? _____

Total number of winners? _____

Which suit looks the best to develop? _____ Why? _____

How do you develop that suit? _____

How many times do you hold up playing your Stopper? _____

Hint: Because the Ace has already been played, you can still use the Rule of Seven to hold up two times before you take your king. Yes, it is true that you can only hold up one more time before you must take your king, but what is the advantage in waiting to take it at the last possible moment????