

The Complete Guide to Three Notrump - Book Review

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It's a lot of people's favorite contract - 3NT. It often seems simpler. No trump suit to worry about. No defensive ruffs. No trumps to pull. Seemingly not as many choices about possible lines of play as when there is a trump suit.

In notrump it's just a race to set up tricks. But 3NT can present subtle complexities in the play. Robert Hamman once said that if at a point in an auction you have several choices of bids, one of which is 3NT, pick it. And it isn't just tournament duplicate players but home rubber bridge players as well who will usually prefer a nine trick contract to an eleven trick contract that scores the same in clubs or diamonds.

And here's a whole book on 3NT from a noted contributor to both *The Bridge Bulletin* and *The Bridge World*.

The first half of Augie Boehm's *Three Notrump in Depth* (HNB Publishing, New York, N.Y.) features bidding, how to get to 3NT when it's right, and stay out when it's wrong.

This part is presented as question-and-answer, depicting the discussion between a bridge teacher and his student. It's an effective format.

The second half is on play of the hand. How to make the normal contracts you should have been in and how to make some of the contracts you probably shouldn't have been in as well.

As defender you'll learn to beat the hard-to-beat contracts. Keeping the dangerous opponent off lead is a key concept.

East-West vulnerable
South dealer.

	<i>North</i>	
	A J 10 9 2	
	8 7 3	
	K Q	
	J 10 4	
<i>West</i>		<i>East</i>
K 8 7		6 5 3
A Q 9 5 2		10 4
8 6 3		9 7 4 2
K 6		8 7 5 2
	<i>South</i>	
	Q 4	
	K J 6	
	A J 10 5	
	A Q 9 3	

As *South* you arrive in 3NT with no opposition bidding. *West* leads the 5, small from dummy, the 10 from *East* (presumably his highest), and you win the jack since you can't afford to duck. It appears *West* has led from five hearts to the A-Q. Now what?

You don't have enough tricks off the top so must take a finesse in a black suit. Which finesse?

Of course, you can't see all four hands.

West is the safe hand. If he gets on lead, your K is still a stopper.

East is the dangerous hand. If he gets in the lead, a heart through your king has *West* running the suit.

Therefore, you don't take the spade finesse just because you are now conveniently in your hand at the end of trick one.

You cross to dummy and finesse in clubs. Maybe the king is on side. But even if it isn't, *West* wins, you have developed additional club tricks, and your K is impervious to attack.

Special Note: In the book, the opposing *East-West* hands aren't filled in. They have been filled in here to make a point. In this diagram, the spade king is on side. The finesse would have worked.

In fact the whole suit comes rolling in, but you don't know that.

It doesn't change things. As declarer, you don't know which opponent might hold which black king, and spurning the spade finesse is still the right play.