

20. Failing to factor in the power of a short suit when supporting

When supporting (only), a doubleton is worth about one extra point, a singleton three, and a void five. When making your supporting bid (Two level = 6-9, Three = 10-12, Four = 13 or more), don't forget to factor in your shortage points as well as your high-card points.

Partner opens 1♠. What would you respond with these?

♠ KJ32	♠ KJ32	♠ KJ32
♥ 752	♥ 2	♥ -
♦ A52	♦ A542	♦ A6542
♣ 852	♣ 8542	♣ 8542

With the first, bid 2♠, eight high-card points and nothing for shortage. With the second, you can add three points for the singleton making 11 support points, enough for 3♠ (10-12). With the third, you can add five points (for the void) to make 13 support points, enough for 4♠.

Let's give opener a typical minimum.

♠ AQ8654
♥ 1086
♦ K
♣ Q97

Facing the first responding hand, even 2♠ will probably be too high. Yet facing the third responding hand (the same eight high-card points), 4♠ will be easy-peasy. That void is massive.

What Happened

Game was missed, the quiet 2♥ making plus three — like this ...

What Should Have Happened

You win West's ♠K lead with dummy's ♠A and seek to ruff all your diamonds. You cross to ♦A and ruff ♦4, then lead ♣3 to ♣K, the finesse succeeding. You ruff ♦6

Dealer: South, Vulnerability: Neither

♠ A862		♠ J74
♥ KJ62		♥ 1085
♦ 2		♦ KQJ5
♣ 8643		♣ AJ9
♠ KQ103		
♥ 9		
♦ 10973		
♣ Q1052		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 95	
	♥ AQ743	
	♦ A864	
	♣ K7	

What Happened

S	W	N	E
1♥	Pass	2♥(1)	Pass
Pass(2)	Pass(3)		

- (1) Oops — fails to factor in the singleton.
- (2) Correct to pass, facing a One-Two ("that'll do").
- (3) Should probably reopen with a protective (take-out) double — but that's another story.

Contract: 2♥, Opening Lead: ♠K

What Should Have Happened

S	W	N	E
1♥	Pass	3♥(1)	Pass
4♥(2)	end		

(1) Adding three for the singleton, North's hand is worth about 11 support points, amply enough for 3♥ (10-12).

(2) Nice shape and honour structure. [For Losing Trick Count fans, you have a six-loser hand, one better than the seven losers of a minimum opener, so should go up one level.]

Contract: 4♥, Opening Lead: ♠K

and lead ♣4.

East rises with ♣A and switches to ♥5 (best) but you win ♥J, ruff ♣6, ruff ♦8 (with ♥K), ruff ♣8, cash ♥AQ and concede ♠9. Eleven tricks made — only ♥9 lead (not recommended) holds you to ten tricks. andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk