



The Gambling 3NT



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STANDARD ENGLISH

IN my articles last year, I looked at suit opening bids from the one to the five level, but so far haven't considered how best to use no trump bids as pre-empts. An opening 2NT shows 20 - 22 HCP. An opening bid of Two Clubs followed by a 2NT rebid shows 23-24 points. And Two Clubs followed by 3NT shows 25-27. Just once in my life I had 29 points in a balanced hand, I opened Two Clubs and rebid a natural 4NT – partner had nothing but I just managed ten tricks!

So, with all those ways to show strong balanced hands that have lots of points, we don't need an opening 3NT as an even stronger opening bid. Many players use it to show at least seven cards in a solid minor suit, with almost nothing in the other three suits, at most a queen or jack. It's called the gambling 3NT because you are gambling that partner has the stoppers, if you have the tricks. So it's up to partner to pass 3NT with some stoppers in the other three suits or to remove to our minor with only a few high card values. For example, in my last article you held:

♠ J 7
♥ J 9
♦ 6
♣ A K Q J 9 7 6 4

We had to choose between 1♣ and 5♣. But opening 3NT gives partner a clear idea of what to expect. You have a

hand with seven or eight cards in clubs, but practically nothing outside, except perhaps an odd jack. The example shown is about the best hand opener is likely to have. If you only had seven solid clubs, say the ♦4 instead of the ♣4, you can still open 3NT.

Test your responding

If second hand passes partner's 3NT opening, what would you respond with the following hands? Make up your mind before you look at my suggestions.

Just remember that partner's minor is probably longer and stronger than any suit you hold. It's a requirement for opening

3NT that the suit is solid and at least seven cards in length!

Hand 1 ♠ Q J 9 ♥ A J 9 7 3 2 ♦ 4 2 ♣ A 6	Hand 2 ♠ A K Q 2 ♥ A K 6 5 ♦ 9 ♣ K Q 5 2
Hand 3 ♠ A 7 6 2 ♥ A 6 5 3 ♦ 9 ♣ J 10 5 2	Hand 4 ♠ Q 7 5 ♥ J 10 8 4 3 2 ♦ 9 4 ♣ 6 5
Hand 5 ♠ K Q J 10 9 7 5 2 ♥ Void ♦ 10 4 2 ♣ 9 8	Hand 6 ♠ A 6 4 ♥ 2 ♦ 10 9 4 2 ♣ 10 8 7 6 3
Hand 7 ♠ K 7 5 2 ♥ A K J 5 ♦ Void ♣ A Q 4 3 2	Hand 8 ♠ A K 8 5 ♥ A J 9 3 ♦ A K 8 ♣ 5 3

1. Pass. You have stoppers in the other three suits. Seven diamonds in partner's hand plus your two aces should mean nine easy tricks. Don't even consider bidding 4♥!

2. 6NT. You were just wondering what to open with your 21 points and partner has made your bid very obvious. Partner has at least seven diamond tricks and you have five more tricks in the majors. Your only loser is the club ace and opponents will do best if they cash it at trick one so you can claim the rest.

3. Pass. Two aces plus at least seven diamonds means nine tricks. At worst opponents can cash three top clubs. If they do, 3NT makes ten tricks.

4. 4♣. With practically no stoppers in the other three suits, you want to play in partner's minor. But you don't know whether partner has solid clubs or diamonds. A bid of 4♣ asks partner to pass with long clubs or to bid 4♦ with long solid diamonds.

This is known as 'Pass or Correct'. Bids of 5♣, 6♣, or even 7♣ are played in the same way. If you don't want to include this option in your responses, you may find yourself having to guess which minor partner holds.

5. 4♠. You don't know if partner holds diamonds or clubs but for certain your opponents have lots of heart tricks to cash and playing in spades with this strong suit makes sense. 4♥ and 4♠ are natural bids over a 3NT opening, telling partner to pass even if void in your suit.

6. 5♣. Opponents surely can make game, and quite possibly a slam, in a major suit. Make their life difficult by bidding to the five level before fourth in hand has a chance to bid. Like the 4♣ bid on Hand 4, 5♣ is Pass or Correct. In fact you are so weak that you might even jump to 6♣ to give opponents a harder problem. At any level, bidding clubs is Pass with clubs or Convert if holding diamonds.

7. 5♦. You can't play in 3NT with a diamond void as you won't be able to get to dummy to cash the diamonds. 5♦ is better played by your hand to protect the tenaces. The opening lead is almost bound to give a trick away.

8. 6NT. You have twelve tricks if partner has seven clubs and thirteen tricks if partner has an eight-card suit.

An additional useful refinement

If your memory can stand the strain, you can add one more asking bid. A bid of 4♦ over 3NT can be used to ask opener if the hand has a singleton or void. Over this, a response of 4♥ shows a singleton or void heart, 4♠ shows a singleton or void spade, 4NT denies a singleton or void, and five of opener's long minor shows a singleton or void in the other minor. □

