

09/03/2020 Hand of the Week 04: Opening long minors and the 'Gambling' 3NT

Here is a hand that Martin brought to my attention, which he played with David Longworth on the Thursday 20th February.

♠ 10
 ♥ 6
 ♦ A 5 2
 ♣ A K Q 10 8 7 4 3

There are a couple of options with this sort of hand. You could open 1♣, with a view to rebidding 3♣. There is a slight danger that the hand will get passed out, although that would be unusual. A more realistic concern is that your opponents will get to overcall their suit, and they might find a sacrifice in one of the majors, or a game if partner has a very weak hand.

A second option would be 2♣, showing a strong hand. Although light on points you have 9 top tricks. This is less likely to get overcalled. If partner bids a relay 2♦, you bid 3♣. This isn't necessarily the best description of your hand and there might be some confusion as to whether the best contract is 3NT or 5♣. If partner shows a stronger holding, either a suit bid or 2NT you will probably still end up bidding 3♣, and partner will be left with a similar decision. The main benefit of the strong opening is that you are unlikely to miss a slam if partner is holding some high cards.

Another 3rd option is a pre-emptive 5♣. I think the hand is too strong- your partner will almost certainly pass and you could miss a slam.

Another option not everyone is aware of is the 'Gambling 3NT'. This classic description of this bid is that it shows a long running minor suit of 7 cards with no outside honours. This is a very clear description of your hand and makes things easier for partner. If they have stops in the other suits then they can pass, otherwise they bid 4♣ and you then choose your minor contract. Holding some Aces and Kings your partner has the option of going on to look for a minor suit slam. There is some room for flexibility with these bids, I feel safer having an entry just in case partner is void in your minor or the suit breaks badly. Here is the full hand.

Dir: East
Vul: E/W
♠ K Q J 7
♥ A K 10 8 2
♦ Q 8 3
♣ 2
Optimum
N 6N

♠ 6 5 3 2 ♥ Q 7 5 ♦ 9 7 4 ♣ 9 6 5	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20px;">W</td><td style="width: 40px; text-align: center;">NORTH</td><td style="width: 20px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">E</td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">6</td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 20px;">S</td><td style="width: 40px; text-align: center;">SOUTH</td><td style="width: 20px;">W</td></tr> </table>	W	NORTH	E	E	6	S	S	SOUTH	W	♠ A 9 8 4 ♥ J 9 4 3 ♦ K J 10 6 ♣ J
W	NORTH	E									
E	6	S									
S	SOUTH	W									

15	
2	10
13	

♠ 10
♥ 6
♦ A 5 2
♣ A K Q 10 8 7 4 3

♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
N	12	9	10	9	12
S	11	9	9	8	11
E	1	4	3	2	1
W	1	4	3	2	1

Partner would have a decision to make whatever you bid, however, I think I would open 3NT with this hand. I think with the weakness in diamonds the best option is to pass. 6NT played by South will go off on a heart or diamond lead. If North can be persuaded to bid 6♣ then it can make, but the bidding to get there would be challenging! On the night 3 pairs stayed in 3NT and 3 pairs ventured on to 6NT.

On the previous night playing with Martin I had picked up a similar hand.

♠ K 10 4
 ♥ 4
 ♦ A K Q 10 9 7 6 3
 ♣ K

The difference here is that you have a reasonable holding in 1 of the major suits. I would not recommend opening a weak 2 holding a 4-card major. Similarly, if you open 3NT with this hand there is a chance of missing a fit in spades, and with this holding there is a much better chance of making a slam. I opened 2♣. This is the full detail.

Dlr: West
 Vul: None

Optimum
 NS 5HX

♠ J 9 8 3
 ♥ A Q J 6 3
 ♦ J
 ♣ Q 9 6

♠ K 10 4
 ♥ 4
 ♦ A K Q 10 9 7 6 3
 ♣ K

	NORTH	
WEST	8	EAST
	SOUTH	

♠ A Q 6 2
 ♥ 9 5
 ♦ 8 4
 ♣ J 10 8 5 3

11
 15 7
 7

♠ 7 5
 ♥ K 10 8 7 2
 ♦ 5 2
 ♣ A 7 4 2

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	6	2	9	5	2
S	6	2	9	5	2
E	6	11	4	8	6
W	6	11	4	8	6

In fact 5♦ is the best contract on this occasion and everyone but ourselves ended up there! We had a competitive auction and after a bit of a mix-up ended up in 4♠. We would have got away with it, and got a top, if spades has split 3-3, but as the cards lie it goes off.

Have a talk to partner about how you can describe hands with a long running minor suit.