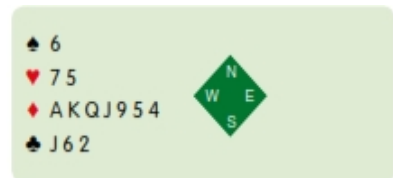


MR BRIDGE LIBRARY - CONVENTIONS

by JEREMY DHONDI GAMBLING 3NT

One of the things noticeable in modern bidding is how often no-trump bids are given artificial meanings. The unusual notrump is an example as is the Jacoby 2NT. In the world of opening bids, 3NT has long been abandoned as showing some enormous balanced hand. This is not only on the grounds of infrequency, but also because these hand types can be better investigated starting with a 2♣ opening bid. A common way, therefore, to use a 3NT opening is to show a hand with a solid minor but not much outside. A typical hand for it might be:



You will never have fewer than seven cards in the minor and you won't have an outside ace or king. If partner is a passed hand then you might choose to muddy the waters a bit but in first or second position, you should be strict in the requirements to help partner to judge the hand. Responding to a 3NT Opening If partner opens 3NT and the next hand passes you should respond as follows:

- Pass You hope to make 3NT
- 4♣ Asks partner to pass with clubs or correct to 4♦
- 4♦ An enquiry: See below
- 4♥/♠ Natural and to play (at least a six card suit)
- 5♣ Pass or correct to 5♦
- 5♦ Pass or correct to 6♣

If you have a hand where the defence are unlikely to be able to cash too many tricks then you might choose to pass. An example hand might be:



With seven tricks in a minor and a couple of aces you will make 3NT, almost for certain, and even if you removed an ace and made it a king, you would still have a reasonable chance of making it. Quite a lot of the time you will want to remove the partnership from 3NT because there is a risk you will go a lot down. It is not a pleasure for the fourth hand to have to deal with the auction: 3NT-Pass-4♣. Later on in this article, I'll suggest how you might defend a 3NT opening. If you were to bid 4♥ or 4♠ over 3NT then this would be because you think you are more likely to make this. A typical hand for a 4♣ bid might be:



You might not make 4♣ but almost certainly you will go lots off in 3NT and 5♣ is not very likely to make.

The 4♦ Response

That leaves 4♦ as a response. It is usual to play this as asking for a singleton (or void). The responses to 4♦ are:

- 4♥/♠ Singleton or void in that suit
- 4NT No singleton or void
- 5♣ Singleton or void diamond
- 5♦ Singleton or void club

At this point, you might be wondering why you bid 5♣ with a singleton diamond. This can be seen by considering the following 3NT opener:



| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 3NT | Pass | 4♦ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

You should bid 5♣ to show your singleton diamond. If you were to bid 5♦ and partner was intending to bid a slam if you had a singleton spade and otherwise settle for game in clubs, he would not now be in a great position. He might hold something like:



Of course, a gambling 3NT opposite a slam try is quite rare so don't make things too complicated because the hand won't happen that often. I once sat with teammates on a train journey from Newcastle to York and they discussed continuations after this start for all 73 miles of the journey. When they (very occasionally) drew breath, I offered thanks that it was an inter-city not a stopping journey.

Responding after Intervention First, if you have a convention then it is wise to be able to cope if the opponents interfere and secondly, you want to be able to penalise them if it is the right thing to do. If they bid a suit, then double by partner is for Penalties with a capital P. A standard rule if you pre-empt is that double of one of their bids is for penalties and it is no different here. If you open 3NT, the next hand bids 4♥ and partner doubles and you then bid 5♣ because you have ♣A-K-Q-J-x-x-x and nothing else, then shooting is too good for you. You have shown your hand, don't show it again or you may need a new partner. If they double 3NT, then bidding is as follows: a bid of a minor asks partner to pass or bid his minor at the lowest available level and a bid of a Major is natural and to play.

That leaves redouble. This shows a good hand and means that: a) you have good chances of making it and b) if they remove the redouble then doubles by your side will be for penalties. Here is my partner's hand from a recent match where I opened 3NT. We won by fewer than 10 IMPs and this hand was worth 18 of them.



My partner bid a disciplined 4♣. At the other table they responded 4♥ to the same opening. Our reward came when the bidding continued:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|----------|
| 3NT | Pass | 4♣ | Pass |
| Pass | 4♣ | Db! | All Pass |

Showing solid clubs. Oh, happy days.

The hand that bid 4♣ had five spades and five diamonds and hoped for a fit. The end result was an 800 penalty. They might have escaped slightly cheaper in 5♦ but it was very hard to get there. At the other table, the hand that responded with 4♥ to the 3NT opening was doubled so he tried 4♣ which was also doubled. His partner put him back to 5♥ (with no spades and three hearts) and the end result was 1,100 penalty and 18 IMPs to the good guys. Well done partner.

Defending against 3NT

The first pillar of defence is leading. If the auction goes: 3NT-All Pass, then it is not the same as leading against a 3NT contract bid in a slower way. You know a lot more about the opening bidder's hand. Suppose you hold:



If your opponents had bid 3NT via a slow route you would likely lead the ♥Q, but here, you need to be aware that declarer will take at least seven tricks in a minor when he gets in, so it is quite usual to lead an ace to get an idea of what the successful defence might be. If you lead the ♠A from the hand above, then dummy might be either of the following hands



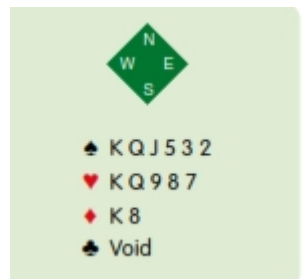
If you lead the ♥Q, then declarer will take two aces and seven or eight clubs. If you lead the ♠A, then you may be able to take five spade tricks before declarer gets in. On another day, dummy might have:



After the ♠A lead, you can switch at trick two to the ♥Q and hope to take six hearts as well as the ♠A. In short, the ace lead gives you more flexibility to find the right defence. Sometimes, you will want to bid over 3NT. I suggest:

- Db! High cards and a hope of beating the contract or taking a penalty if they escape
- 4♣/♦ See below
- 4♥/♠ Natural and to play

You can, of course, play 4♣/♦ as natural and non-forcing but the most likely thing you want to do if you can't defend and beat their contract, is to bid four of a major. Quite often, if you have a single suited minor you can double and then bid it or perhaps jump to the five level. So, a use for 4♣/♦ is to show both majors. 4♣ shows better hearts and 4♦ shows better spades. If you hold the following:



then the lack of aces should deter you from doubling. The wrong lead could be disastrous. Imagine leading a spade against 3NT doubled and seeing the opponents take eight clubs and the ♠A, when you can cash around ten tricks in the red suits and also make a game your way. Instead, you can bid 4♦ to show the majors with better spades. You wouldn't want to have to bid 4♣ and find partner with one spade and four hearts. The other merit of this is that partner may know better what to do if the opponents seek to save by bidding five of their minor.

Summary

- A 3NT opening makes the opponents' life difficult. Don't make your partner's life difficult too, by having an unsuitable hand.
- Responses are mostly natural, but 4♦ can be used as a singleton enquiry to aid slam bidding.
- If you are on lead against a gambling 3NT consider leading an ace to gauge the best defence after trick one.
- Consider how you bid after an opponent opens 3NT. It is rare but you don't want to have a misunderstanding when it does happen.