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This Week in Bridge

(178) Non-Serious 3NT

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Level: 5

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General

When we find a Major suit fit at the 3-level in a game forcing auction, then partner is usually expressing interest in slam (because without slam interest, partner would have applied the Principle of Fast Arrival and bid 4M.) In this case, now we usually express whether we have slam interest or not by either making a cuebid or simply bidding game with 4M. A partnership can use a gadget called “Non-Serious 3NT” to gain even further clarification about a player’s level of slam interest. Let’s see how it works.

Non-Serious 3NT

When we are trying for slam in a Major suit and 3NT is not a final contract we are entertaining playing in, then 3NT is available to be used as a gadget to help us better judge whether to bid slam. This gadget is called “Non-Serious 3NT” (NS 3NT).

Example

Playing this gadget, the following auction has several slam try options:

1♠ 2♣

2♠ 3♠

___?

- | | | |
|------------|--------|--|
| • 4♠ | Small | No slam interest; usually 12-14 pts |
| • 3NT | Medium | Non-Serious 3NT, showing mild slam interest, asking partner to cuebid with a good hand; Opener usually has extra points, about 14-15 pts, or a control-rich minimum. |
| • 4♣/4♦/4♥ | Large | “Serious Cuebid”, showing extra values and a CSC. This shows a good hand, usually 16+ pts, and a control. |
| • 4NT | XL | Keycard, when slam looks right and Keycards are enough info. |



After Non-Serious 3NT

When we bid NS 3NT, we show some extra values and leave room for partner to decide about slam.

- If partner has a minimum hand, they simply sign off in game with 4M, not giving any more information to the opponents.
- With some extra values, partner can use this space to cuebid and exchange information, OR partner can just sign off in 4M if they don't have a strong desire to cuebid or are worried about giving information to the opponents.
- With a very good hand, partner can cuebid OR bid 4NT Keycard and use that info to determine if to bid slam.

Rules for Non-Serious 3NT

Partnerships that choose to play NS 3NT need rules for when it applies and when 3NT is natural and to play or an offer to play. Each partnership can come up with their own rules, but a common set of rules is that 3NT is non-serious when the auction contains:

- A bid and supported Major suit at the 3-level in a game forcing auction,
- 8+c fit, and
- Neither player showing a balanced hand.

Example

1NT 2♣

2♠ 3♠

3NT Offer to play. Since 3♠ was non-forcing, 3NT accepts the invitation and is an offer to play in 3NT or 4♠. Opener also showed a balanced hand. *NOT* NS 3NT.

Non-Serious 3♠

In auctions where ♥ are the trump suit, we can switch the meaning of 3♠ and 3NT, making 3♠ the non-serious bid showing a medium hand with some slam interest, and 3NT the serious CSC in ♠. This provides us with Serious vs. Non-Serious information for our ♠ cuebids allowing us to know if partner has a medium hand or a good hand with a ♠ control.

Example

1♥ 2♣

2♥ 3♥

___?

- 3NT CSC in ♠, good (large) hand
- 3♠ NS slam try. Partner continues with 3NT as a ♠ cuebid, 4♣ and 4♦ as natural cuebids, or a sign off in 4♥.



Conclusion

In your regular partnership, consider adding some more nuance to your cuebidding auctions. Use this otherwise unused 3NT bid as Non-Serious 3NT to help distinguish mild slam tries (with non-serious 3NT) from more serious slam tries (with CSCs). You will find that this allows your partnership to make better slam bidding decisions and control when to give information to the opponents when only one player is mildly interested in slam.