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(27) More Notrump: Trick-Showing Notrump Bids

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Level: Intermediate/ Advanced

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General

From our previous lessons, you might have noticed that 3NT Opening bids or rebids are not generally used to show any of the balanced hands.

- With 20-21 points and a balanced hand we open 2NT,
- With 22+ points and a balanced hand we open 2♣.

So what do these opening 3NT bids show? Many 3NT bids show unbalanced hands with lots of tricks. This may seem a bid counterintuitive, but let's examine the contract of 3NT to help us understand these 3NT bids better.

When we bid and play 3NT there are two ways to make our contract: we can have lots of HCP that we use to take 9 tricks, or we can have a long suit that we can use to produce a lot of tricks. These 3NT opening bids are how we show the hands with lots of tricks, but not lots of points.

Hands with Tricks – Long Suits

Hands with lots of tricks usually contain long, strong suits. Learning how to show them is an important part of single-suited-hand bidding. If we have a 6+card suit (weak or strong) then we general already have ways to show it:

- 6+card suit, 5-10 points Open a weak-two bid
- 6+card suit, 12-14 points Open 1-suit and rebid 2-suit
- 6+card suit, 15-17 points Open 1-suit and rebid 3-suit

Difficult Hands

Some difficult hands to describe are the hands that play better than just the number of HCP they have in them. These hands contain long suits that can produce tricks for our side.



Difficult Hands – 18-19 points

These difficult types of hands are the ones with 6+card suits and 18+ points. Let's examine some of these different types of hands.

- 6+card suit, 18-19 points Open 1-suit and make up a bid!?!)

When we have 18-19 points we have to make up a bid to describe our hand. We need to show our strength so we usually either jump shift or reverse. But if we don't have another suit to jump shift or reverse into then we have to lie in a suit in order to communicate our strength to partner. Generally speaking, we do so by lying in a 3-card minor (showing it as a 4-card suit.)

Example

1♦ 1♠
3♣

With 1-3-6-3 and 18 points, we have a game-forcing hand once partner can respond, so we need to create a game-forcing auction; we do so by making a jump shift.

Difficult Hands – 20+ point Hands

For the strongest hands we also have problems in the bidding.

- 6+card suit, 20+ points Open 2♣ and rebid our suit.

These 20+ point hands can get us too high (especially in a minor) and make it difficult for us to find a fit in another suit. This is especially true if we have the ♦ suit – we are at 3♦ before we get to show anything about our hand.

Difficult Hands – Long Solid Suits

Hands that have a long, strong suit have much more playing strength than their number of HCP would suggest, so we need a way to bid them strongly without overstating our high-card strength. In particular, the hands with solid suits have a tremendous amount of playing strength, since we don't have to develop the suit at all to run it. We want to bid them very aggressively.

- AKQJxx
- AKQxxxx
- AKQxxxxx, etc...

With only a 6-card solid suit we will bid naturally (just upgrading the strength of our hand a bit for our length points.) But with a 7+card solid minor we almost have 3NT made in our hand. We need to make sure that we show the playing strength of our hand to our partner. Let's break down these types of hands and figure out the best way to describe them to partner.



If we have a way to show a 7+card solid (minor) suit then the main other thing we need to describe is our outside suit holdings. Outside Queens and Jacks can be useful cards for stoppers, but we are generally going to ignore them and focus on our quick tricks – outside Aces and Kings.

Let's examine these hands more specifically.

- 7+card solid minor suit with no outside A/K: Open 3NT* – *Gambling 3NT*
- 7+card solid minor suit with 1 outside A/K: Open 1m and jump to 3NT – this shows tricks!
- 7+card solid minor suit with 2 outside A/K: Open 2♣ - we have about 9 tricks in our hand.

Note: If we have 7-4 shape with a solid suit (especially with a 4-card Major) we are 2-suited and thus bid our suits naturally.

Mistake to avoid: Many players get excited when they have a balanced 19-count and partner responds to their opening bid. 'Surely there's game here,' they think, so they bid 3NT. The proper rebid to describe this hand is 2NT – showing a balanced hand too strong to open 1NT and not strong enough to open 2NT. The 3NT rebid shows a very different hand type: a decent hand with a solid suit. With balanced hands we need to describe our shape and strength to partner. Don't worry that you might miss a game; if you rebid 2NT and partner passes, it's probably the right choice.

Gambling 3NT Opening

Gambling 3NT is a powerful tool. It serves as a mix of a preempt and an attempt to make a game based on our running suit. Our partner will generally pass with stoppers in three suits (knowing we are solid in the other suit.) With a suit unstopped, partner can get us to play in our suit by bidding ♣ - asking us to pass or correct to ♦.

A Gambling 3NT Opening (in 1st or 2nd Seat) shows a solid 7+card minor and no outside Ace or King.



Here are the Responses to Gambling 3NT Opening:

4♣*	Pass or correct to 4♦	Weak hand w/o stoppers
4♦*	Game Forcing Slam Try	Asks for shortness in Opener's hand
4♥	To Play	Lots of ♥ and a good hand
4♠	To Play	Lots of ♠ and a good hand
4NT	Slam Try, length ask	5♣ = 7, 5♦ = 8, 5♥ = 9, etc...
5♣	Pass or correct to 5♦	Preemptive or to make!?!
6♣	Pass or correct to 6♦	A good hand

Note: A 3NT opening in 3rd or 4th seat is not Gambling - it is to play. It can be almost any hand with which partner hopes they can make 3NT opposite a passed hand!

Conclusion

I hope that now we can see the way that 3NT bids and rebids can be used to show hands with lots of tricks, not lots of points. And I hope that you all can now bid to these great 3NT games!