

Gambling 3NT

An opening bid at the 3-level is normally pre-emptive, and is used to make it harder for the opponents to find their best contract. By agreement, this can also apply to an opening bid of 3NT!

However, 3NT is generally a specialized bid, describing at least a 7-card Minor suit, that can be relied on to produce 7 tricks. Thus an opening bid of 3C or 3D, which also is normally a 7-card suit, is not a solid suit. While agreements can vary, the common expectation is for no Ace or King in an outside suit.

What is responder expected to do if their partner opens with a gambling 3NT? Since the bid denies an outside Ace or King, it is their hand that determines their action. If the responder has stoppers in both majors and one minor, and at least a singleton in the other minor, they can pass, expecting 3NT to make based on the opener's 7 tricks in the implied minor.

If the responder has a stopper in both majors, but nothing in either minor, they can pass 3NT and hope for the best, unless it is doubled, when it may be prudent to escape into opener's minor. To escape, responder bids 4C or 5C, and opener is expected to convert to 4D or 5D if that is their suit. If responder has a good hand, 6C and 7C work the same way. Responder will also escape in this manner with a weak hand before any doubling begins.

What if responder bids 4D after an opening bid of 3NT? Opener passes if their suit is diamonds, otherwise rebids 5C, which responder will probably raise to 6C, or even 7C!

Normal defence against the gambling 3NT is to cash an Ace if you have one, as the sight of dummy or partner's signal, may indicate an effective switch at trick 2.

	Q83			
Bd	KQJ986			
Dir	3			
Vul	852			
54		KJ9		
42		AT53		
AKQJ852		64		
J3		A764		
	AT762			
	7			
	T97			
	KQT9			
W	N	E	S	
3NT	//			

When West opens 3D in first or second seat, North will normally pass, and East is on the spot, but the CA indicates that opener's suit is diamonds!

Of course if East was declarer, the 2 Aces mean that even Kx in spades would be enough, but with the opening lead through the spades that would be risky. However, KJx is more than enough to assure at least 9 tricks.

Give East 764 in both minors instead of the CA, and a 4C response would be safer, as if North has the CA and lays it on the table, this will lead to probable disaster in that suit. This minor suit holding also makes it impossible to ascertain opener's minor suit, hence the 4C response.

	Q83			
Bd	KQJ986			
Dir	3			
Vul	A52			
54		AJ9		
42		AT53		
AKQJ852		64		
J3		8764		
	KT762			
	7			
	T97			
	KQT9			
W	N	E	S	
3NT	//			

This time, with a weak holding in both minors, East does not know which suit West has, but with both majors stopped, may risk passing 3NT, especially when the major suit stoppers are Aces!

North has a normal lead of the HK, but on that lead West can run 9 quick tricks.

Note that on this layout if North decides to look at dummy first by leading the CA, NS can only run 4 club tricks before surrendering the lead and again conceding 9 tricks.

Bd	A83			
Dlr	KJT986			
Vul	3			
54	A52			
42		QT9		
AKQJ852		AQ53		
J3		64		
		8764		
	KJ762			
	7			
	T97			
	KQT9			
W	N	E	S	
3NT	//			

Again, with a weak holding in both minors, East does not know which suit West has, but with both majors stopped, may risk passing 3NT.

North has a normal lead of the HJ, but holding 2 Aces, it is often wise to have a look at dummy before making the next lead.

Note that on this layout if North decides to lead the HJ, West is forced to take the successful finesse, and then thankfully running 9 tricks.

Which Ace to lead? It is purely a guess, but on this hand when dummy goes down it is obvious that South has the black Kings since West denied an outside Ace or King so it does not matter.

If North chooses to lead the SA, South will encourage and NS will take the first 5 spade tricks. Then knowing West does not have an Ace, South can lead to North's CA and NS take the first 9 tricks.

Bd	8			
Dlr	J9865			
Vul	3			
54	A87652			
42		AKQ98		
AKQJ852		AKQT53		
J3		64		
		-		
	AT762			
	7			
	T97			
	KQT94			
W	N	E	S	
3NT	/	5C!	/	
5D	/	7D	//	

This is an extreme example, but East knows that if West has clubs, there are at least 11 tricks, losing just 2 Diamonds, so jumps to 5C, expecting West to pass and confirm a solid club suit.

However, when West converts to Diamonds, there is an easy grand slam available.

If East has a singleton club and one less heart, then raise 5D to 6D, which will be cold opposite most layouts.