

Open 3NT with a big hand? – don't be silly.

What is 3NT in the sequence 2♣ - 2♦ - 3NT? Answer – a very silly bid!

You hold one of these hands and partner opens 3NT (25+). Or else it goes 2♣ - 2♦ - 3NT to show 25+.

Hand A	Hand B	Should you pass or bid Stayman with Hand A?
♠ 8632	♠ 86532	Should you pass or transfer with Hand B?
♥ 74	♥ 4	Obviously it's a complete lottery and most players past the
♦ J872	♦ J872	beginner's stage play have some way to show the big balanced
♣ 843	♣ 843	hand below the level of 3NT (Benjamin, Multi or Kokish).

Traditionally 3NT here (and/or an opening of 3NT) are used to show very big balanced hands, 25+ points. But there is absolutely no doubt that this is very silly as it inhibits the use of transfers/Stayman/Baron whatever by a very weak responder. One solution is to also play 2♦ as also a strong bid (or else Multi with a strong balanced hand included) so that the sequence 2♦ - 2♥ - 2NT shows 25+. However, many players, especially from America, are not enlightened enough to play two strong artificial bids. But if you play 2♣ as your only strong bid then one North American player has actually come up with a scheme to solve the problem: –

The Kokish relay: -

After a strong 2♣ and 2♦ response (negative or waiting – however you play it)

Then 2♥ = either natural with a ♥ suit or 25+ balanced.

Responder then always bids 2♠ (the Kokish relay which says nothing at all) and –

Opener then defines his hand: 2NT = 25+ balanced

Any other bid = strong ♥ opener.

Note that the Kokish relay works fine with 2♦ waiting/2♥ negative when responder bids 2♦ but when responder bids 2♥ (totally bust) then there is a problem. But at least the Kokish relay solves the problem most of the time. If you want to solve it completely then play Benjamin twos or the Multi 2♦ or play 2♦ negative to 2♣.

The Gambling 3NT

As we saw above it is obviously very silly to use the 3NT opening as a very strong balanced hand, so what is the best use? Undoubtedly it's the 'gambling' 3NT.

There are various treatments but the best is a completely solid minor suit AKQJxxx(x) and **absolutely no** outside ace or king. Playing this treatment partner knows exactly what you have and will only pass when he has stoppers in 3 suits.

If responder does not want to play in 3NT (because a suit is wide open) then he bids 4♣ (pass or correct).

Of course the gambling 3NT is not a weak hand and there may be slam. If responder is interested in slam he can bid 4♦ which asks opener to show his singleton (or void).

Responses to the 4♦ shape ask are:

4♥ = ♥ shortage

4♠ = ♠ shortage

4NT = no shortage (2227 or 2272)

5♣ = shortage in the other minor (responder should be able to work out which one!).