

# Gross 3 No Trump Opening Bid

Compiled by John Gross

Contributed: July 21, 2010

This 3 No Trump opening bid asks partner to indicate precisely which Ace(s) he holds. It is designed to be used with any of a variety of hands:

- from those where a slam or grand slam will be laydown if partner holds one specific Ace,
- to others where opener needs partner to hold two or even three specific Aces, if slam is to succeed,
- and one or two may be needed even to make a 5-level contract.

Only two minimum conditions apply to the 3 No Trump bidder's hand:

- 1) the hand must be void in one or two suits; if no void is held, then it is likely that other bidding methods can discover the number of Aces held by partner (and, of course, three voids constitute a trivial case!);
- 2) the 3 No Trump bidder must be willing to play in some suit at the 5-level, even if partner shows no Aces, and regardless of partner's holding in the probable trump suit. This implies a suit that is very long (or very strong if only 6 or 7 cards), and is typical of certain hands on which the holder would be quite willing to sacrifice at the 5-level over a probable making game for the opponents.

It is also suggested that the bid can be used in other situations than an opening bid (specifically, as an overcall), but partner would normally have passed or not yet had an opportunity to bid. This could, of course, be varied by partnership agreement, but it seems to me that a response of 3NT is valuable in other more frequent situations.

At this point, it may be appropriate to acknowledge that I have been aware for some time of the 3 No Trump opening bid known as the *Kabel 3NT*, but my initial attempts at working out a response structure pre-dated my first encounter with Kabel, and I believe that the responses I propose differ sufficiently from those of Kabel for me to claim my version as a conventional bid in its own right.

## Responses to Gross 3 No Trump

The responses in detail are as follows (working – in the interest of clarity - from the simplest to the more complex, rather than *from bottom to top*):

Responder's Aces	Responder's Bid	Notes
None	4NT	3NT bidder will probably bid 5 of the suit he had in mind when opening, but may pass.
All (four)	5NT	Four Aces should presumably allow opener to bid 7NT, or at least a suit grand slam.
Three (one missing)	5 of the suit below the missing Ace	If the ♣A is missing, responder must bid 5♠. Opener should now have enough information to place the final contract.
One	4 of the Ace's suit	See below for opener's further options, and responder's rebids.
Two	4 of the lower ranked Ace's suit	See below for opener's further options, and responder's rebids.

### Further Developments - (applying to the latter two cases only):

- a) if the information shown by responder's first bid – namely, one Ace that he does hold and perhaps one or more Aces that he does not hold - happens to be sufficient, opener may be able to place the final contract, perhaps even by passing (note: if responder bids 4♠, he must have one only);
- b) if opener needs to know whether responder holds a second Ace, he may make a further asking bid, simply by rebidding the next higher ranked suit; this asks specifically *Do you also have this Ace?*

Responder's choices in reply to this question are as follows:

- i. with only the Ace he first bid, he must rebid 4NT (*No*);
- ii. with the Ace specified by opener's rebid, he must rebid 5♣ (*Yes*);
- iii. with a second Ace ranked higher than opener's rebid, he must rebid the suit of that Ace (*No, but I do have this Ace*).

After the above sequences are completed, opener will have all the information he needs to place the final contract, which responder should obviously accept unconditionally and pass.

At this point it may be worth noting – as an aid to memory – that:

- 4-level suit bids are used only to identify one or two Aces partner may have;
- 4NT has two negative meanings: zero Aces; and *No* to opener's rebid;
- the 5-level is all encouraging: suits show three Aces; NT shows four; and the 5♣ rebid by responder means *Yes* to opener's 4-level rebid.

## Possible Sequences

To represent the above possible sequences in a form that I find useful (and may help to clarify the structure); the lines and ‘arrows’ indicate the only meaningful sequence of bids:

First Bid	Responder First Bid	Opener Rebid	Resp. Rebid	Opener Final	Meaning by opener/responder
3NT					Please name any Ace(s) you hold.
>	4♣/♦/♥	→	→		<i>This Ace, and perhaps another of higher rank.</i>
	↳	4n/r/s			(next ranked suit) Do you also have this Ace?
		>	4♥/♠		<i>(if possible) No, but I do have this Ace.</i>
		>	4NT		<i>The Ace first bid; none higher than your rebid.</i>
		↳	5♣		<i>The Ace I first bid, and the Ace of your rebid.</i>
>	4♠	→	→		<i>I have the ♠A only.</i>
>	4NT	→	→		<i>I have no Ace.</i>
>	5♣/♦/♥	→	→		<i>Three Aces, missing the ♦/♥/♠A respectively.</i>
>	5♠	→	→		<i>Three Aces, missing the ♣A.</i>
↳	5NT	→	→		<i>I have all four Aces.</i>
			Final Contract		Opener’s choice of the final contract.

Further sequences may be possible – and would depend on partnership agreements – but at this point it may be appropriate to present some examples.

### Example 1: N/S are vulnerable.

North  
 ♠ 843  
 ♥ AQ76  
 ♦ J4  
 ♣ QJ94

West  
 ♠ 2  
 ♥ 1098542  
 ♦ 3  
 ♣ A8752

East  
 ♠ 965  
 ♥ KJ  
 ♦ 9865  
 ♣ K1063

South (D)  
 ♠ AKQJ107  
 ♥ 3  
 ♦ AKQ1072  
 ♣ -

On this hand, reported by Ron Klinger from the qualifying rounds of the South-West Pacific Teams some years ago, the holder of the above hand was dealer, and the simplest auction Ron described was: 3NT-pass-4♥-pass, 7♠-all pass. The pair was playing Kabel, but the auction would be the same if playing my proposed convention.

**Example 2:** Both non-vulnerable

North	
♠ A	
♥ Q98	
♦ Q1083	
♣ A10972	
West	East
♠ 2	♠ 104
♥ K10763	♥ AJ52
♦ A95	♦ 762
♣ K854	♣ QJ63
South (D)	
♠ KQJ987653	
♥ 4	
♦ KJ4	
♣ -	

Playing the Gross 3NT opening, you would be hoping for a 5♠ or 5NT response, either of which would enable you to bid the Spade slam, or even 5♣ or 5♦, giving you some slam chances. Most responses showing fewer than three Aces would put even 5♠ at some risk. On the hand as dealt, you get 4♣ (the worst you could wish for) but you are now committed, so you can rebid 4♦, to which partner rebids 4♠, and you can now pass with some confidence that partner – who has to play the hand – will succeed ... which he does easily, holding ♠: A ♥: Q98 ♦: Q1083 ♣: A10972.

Note that, using Kabel, responder would have bid 5♠, which also makes but – at the higher level – is a greater risk.

My final example is not from actual play, but one I concocted to illustrate possibly the most extreme type of hand on which the Gross 3NT opening could be used:

**Example 3:** ♠: - ♥: K4 ♦: - ♣: QJ1098765432

With a mere six high card points, one could open 3NT; a response of 4♣ ensures that the Club game is safe, and a rebid showing the ♥A ensures a laydown grand slam.

The most awkward response would be 5♠ - showing all Aces but the ♣A – but even then the forced rebid of 6♣ may succeed if partner happens to hold the ♣K, or if the two top ♣ honours clash ... not unreasonable odds for a slam on such a hand!

(Note that if the 11-card suit were any other, an agreement could be made for opener to rebid his suit at the 5-level, asking partner to bid the slam if he holds the relevant King.)