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Our Readers Ask

Dear Eric,

1.	West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♠	Dbl
	2♠	?		

How should we play North's double, 2NT and 3♣? As a side note, do you like 1NT after 1♣-Pass-1♠ to show 5-5 in the red suits?

2.	West	North	East	South
	1♠	2♠*	3♠	3NT

*Michaels.

As with many sequences, I realize that partnership agreement is what's most important. That said, how would you recommend we play 3NT?

Richard Ross

1. Double is competitive with three diamonds and three hearts, hoping for a 5-3 red-suit fit. 2NT and 3♣ are best treated as natural, although many, if not most, would treat 3♣ as a cuebid.

I prefer to treat 1NT as natural, especially today when everyone responds very light and opening bids don't mean much.

2. I wouldn't give up the natural 3NT here. Whether you use double or 4♣ as lesser minor-suit requests than 4NT is up to you. And yes, style matters, as weak or strong Michaels establishes advancer's

priorities a lot more clearly than "any old 5-5."

Dear Eric,

In a recent club game I was blessed to pick up the following hand as West:

♠AK5 ♥KJ1073 ♦AKJ104 ♣—.

While I contemplated my opening bid, right hand opponent opened 3♣. We were playing standard methods and I chose to double because of my strength, but the bidding sequence that followed was a disaster. The hand is cold for 7♦, 7♥ or 7NT, but we played 6♠ down two.

Partner's hand:

♠10843 ♥AQ6 ♦Q98 ♣A72

West	North	East	South
Dbl	Pass	4♠	3♣
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♠	All Pass		Pass

Partner felt he had a choice between bidding 3NT, 4♣ and 4♠. In discussions we decided that 4♣ may have been the best call, but even after that we would have difficulty reaching 6♥ and would not have come close to thinking about seven. Had I elected to overcall 3♥ we would have easily reached 6♥ and maybe 7♥. Overcalling on such a strong hand goes against my general principles (the under-bid risks partner passing), but after the double it becomes extremely difficult to describe my hand.

Could you advise me on the merits of double versus overcall, or are there special treatments which help with these bidding situations?

Claire Jones

Tough hand. I'm not bothered by being too strong for an overcall, but the reason for doubling is that you have good support for all unbid suits — just not good enough support for spades, as it went.

Here's an idea you may like. Over an opponent's 3♣ or 3♦ opening:

Dbl = takeout

3x, 3NT = natural, as always

4♣ = hearts and spades

4♦ = any strong one-suiter

(For this one, any response suggests you would pass if that hits partner's long suit, but that your hand is slam-positive if partner's suit is one you bypass with your response. For example, (3♣)-4♦-(Pass)-4♠ says "I'm willing to cooperate in a slam-try sequence if your suit is hearts, but not spades.")

4♥ = hearts and the other minor, strong

4♠ = spades and the other minor, strong

Even though I could bid 4♥ with this hand, I'm not sure it's the best action, as we'd miss 6-3 spades sometimes to play 5-2 in a red suit.

I don't care for the 4♠ reply to the double, but it's not at all unreasonable, and you can imagine 3NT working terribly. 4♣ is only notionally a solution, as over 4♦ or 4♥ you'd have to continue with 4♠. Even if you define this as at least two places to play rather than "slam try in spades," how do you sort everything out?

Bottom line is that any direct action or reply to a double could work well or badly. The gentle 3♥ has a lot going for it, including finding 5-3 or 6-3 spades, 3NT or perhaps even a high diamond contract. Yes, you could end in 3♥ on occasion with 6♦ decent. □