

# Slamming after 2 NT - 3 ♣ -- Problem

## Board 13

West Deals

None Vul



♠ 10 7  
♥ K 9 8 3  
♦ Q 9 8 6 4  
♣ K 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦ <sup>1</sup>
Pass	2 NT <sup>2</sup>	Pass	3 ♣ <sup>3</sup>
Pass	?		

1. Negative; or waiting, lacking a good suit.
2. 23-24 HCP, balanced.
3. Regular Stayman.

Join me for this deal in an online matchpoint pairs game. Our card says the range for a 2 NT opening is 20+ to 22. We play the Kokish Relay, officially named *birthright* by Eric Kokish: over our 2 ♦, partner would bid 2 ♥ to show either hearts or a game-forcing balanced hand. This puts his range at 23-24 HCP (or possibly a great 22 or a 4-3-3-3 25). As with most pairs, we play the same way over opener's 2 NT rebid as we would over a 2 NT opening bid.

As you may know, I refuse to play puppet Stayman in this situation. Sometimes we play in 3 NT with a 5-3 fit in opener's major suit; some of those times, the major suit plays better; sometimes we take the same number of tricks in notrump, for a matchpoint win; sometimes the opening lead is in our unbid 5-card major. Puppet Stayman complicates auctions, and prevents responder from first bidding 3 ♣, and then bidding a long minor suit as a natural slam invitation (canceling the major suit message).

Anyhow, we start with 3 ♣, asking opener. Suppose opener bids:

1. 3 ♦. What would 4 NT mean? What are the continuations after 4 NT? What would you do?
2. 3 ♥. What would 4 NT mean? 3 ♠ ? 4 ♣ ? What would you do?
3. 3 ♠. What would 4 NT mean? 4 ♣ ? 4 ♥ ? What would you do?

# Slamming after 2 NT - 3 ♣ -- Solution

## Board 13

West Deals

None Vul

♠ 8 5 4 2		♠ A K Q 9
♥ 10 6 2		♥ A Q 7 4
♦ J 10 5 3		♦ A 7
♣ J 7		♣ A 6 3
	W	
	N	
	E	
	S	
		♠ J 6 3
		♥ J 5
		♦ K 2
		♣ Q 10 9 8 5 2
		♠ 10 7
		♥ K 9 8 3
		♦ Q 9 8 6 4
		♣ K 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦ <sup>1</sup>
Pass	2 NT <sup>2</sup>	Pass	3 ♣ <sup>3</sup>
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	3 NT
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	5 ♣
Pass	6 ♥	All pass	

1. Negative; or waiting, lacking a good suit.
2. 23-24 HCP, balanced.
3. Regular Stayman.

Whether opener answers 3 ♦, 3 ♥, or 3 ♠, our 4 NT is a natural slam invitation (quantitative). If opener named a major suit, 4 NT says that was the wrong one -- we have the other. Over 4 NT, opener accepts by bidding suits up the line. So opener would either pass our 4 NT or bid five of the other major, their only side suit. That rules out a 5-4 diamond fit, so we could offer 5 NT, or try for 5-3 with 6 ♦ (odds-against, with 4-4 majors).

As I already mentioned, 4 ♣ would cancel the major suit message and be a natural slam try, based on a long suit. To explore slam in opener's major suit, we make an artificial bid of the other major - this sets trump, thereby turning 4 NT by either partner into Roman Keycard Blackwood.

My decision was to pursue slam only if we found a heart fit. We have a combined maximum of 32 HCP between us. This is close. When partner named spades, we sign off in 3 NT. Partner then "raised" my hearts to four. We do not play kickback, so 4 NT would ask for keycards, a bad bid for two reasons: (1) we still want to invite, not drive to slam, and (2) hearts are trump, and we hold only one keycard -- never do that, because a 5 ♠ response would commit us to a bad slam. That leaves 5 ♣, our cheapest first or second round control. Partner, knowing we have a hand worthy of a slam try only with a 4-4 heart fit, bids the slam.

Most of the time, it does not matter whether opener bids hearts or spades first, holding 4-4 majors. It does, this time. Had partner bid 3 ♥, we could have set trump with 3 ♠, and RKB would have been available -- plus cue bids at the 4-level after that. If our fit turns out to be in spades, opener would remove our 3 NT to 4 ♠, leaving us in the same situation. After the 3 ♠ response, we must use 4 ♥ to set trump, an inefficiency. To restate, if we find a fit in the first suit, there can be an advantage if that suit is hearts. If we find a fit in the second suit, our capabilities are degraded, whichever suit it is.

One line of play is to attempt to ruff the third round of each black suit in dummy; this fails in clubs. Partner chose a winning line: draw trump in three rounds, and play on diamonds. The play is over when the ♦ K pops up in front of the queen. Had this play failed, the next play is to cross to dummy with the ♣ K and ruff a diamond. If diamonds don't split, cash and ruff clubs, possibly squeezing out a spade guard. Play the spades.