

What does 1NT - 3♣/3♦ 3♥/3♠ mean?

NG34Bridge

Modern Acol reserves a three level suit response to partner's weak no trump for a very specific situation, where no other bid does the job. It is used by responder to alert partner that game is practically certain, either in the suit or in 3NT, and a slam may be on. It is asking partner to bid carefully so that the best contract is found.

Partner bids 1NT and you have this hand:

♠ 6	You have 17 HCP. Slam may be on if partner has 14 HCP and three hearts.
♥ A Q J 6 4	
♦ K J 5 4	If you bid 2♦ (transfer) opener may pass 3♥ and will definitely pass 4♥.
♣ A Q 3	You are too weak to go 'slamming' right away (partner may only have 12 HCP and two small hearts). 3NT may be the best contract.

You need a way of alerting partner to the strength and shape of your hand and which suit will be trumps if you don't end up in a No Trump contract. It also alerts partner to the possibility of a slam. Only a bid of 3♥ does this.

When partner opens 1NT, a jump to the 3-level promises the following:

1NT - 3♣/3♦. 6+ good cards (SQT 9+) and 18+HCP unlimited

1NT - 3♥/3♠. 5+ good cards (SQT 8+) and 17+ HCP unlimited

Subsequent bids (up to the 3NT level) are cue bids for STOPS (not for controls).

If opener has 2+ card support and minimum he should bid 3NT. Partner can then decide whether to carry on bidding, and, if so, whether a slam is still a possibility.

If opener has 3+ card support and is better than minimum he should carry on beyond 3NT, cue bidding for controls. Opener must leave to partner the decision whether to bid 4NT (RKCB) or to skip 4NT and carry on cue bidding. A bid of the trump suit at game level or above is a sign-off. Partner's decision will be influenced by factors such as the presence or otherwise of a doubleton missing both the Ace and the King, or the need to find the location of the trump queen.

West	West	East	East has not signed off in 3NT or in 4♥. His 3♠ bid suggests at least 3 card heart support and a maximum 1NT hand. It also shows the ♠A (once a major suit has been agreed as trumps, any bid above three of the trump suit is a cue bid). West's 4♣ is a cue bid showing first round control in clubs. East's 4♥ denies the ♦A and is a signoff. West bids 4NT and East shows two key cards. As East had denied the ♦A he must have ♥K as well as ♠A.
♠ 6		1NT	
♥ A Q J 6 4	3♥	3♠	
♦ K J 5 4	4♣	4♠	
♣ A Q 3	4NT	5♥	
	6♥	P	

Your partner bids 1NT and you have this 18 HCP hand:

♠ A Q
♥ 9 4
♦ K Q 3
♣ A Q J 6 4 2

Do you bid 3NT? Or 5♣? Or do you go straight to 6♣.

What about Gerber? Suppose you get a disappointing answer and want to sign off in 5♣? Partner does not know what your long suit is, and will take that to be asking for Kings.

Swop your club and diamond holdings and you still have the problem of the small doubleton in hearts. You need to find out whether the opponents have the ♥AK and can take two tricks off the top. Gerber won't help here.

You need another way of alerting partner to the strength and shape of your hand and the possibility of a slam. Only a bid of 3♣ does this. It says:

"Partner, we have game for sure. I have at least six really good clubs (SQT 8+) and 18+ HCP. The best contract may be in clubs or in no trumps, and a slam may be on. Let's tread carefully to find the best contract"

West
♠ A Q
♥ 9 4
♦ K Q 3
♣ A Q J 6 4 2

West East
1NT
3♣ 3♦
3♠ 4♦
4♠ 6♣

East's 3♦ shows a good stop in Diamonds. West's 3♠ shows a spade stop (and denies a heart stop). East's 4♦ bypasses 3NT, showing at least 3 card clubs support and suggesting a maximum 1NT hand. Cue bids after 3NT show controls rather than stops, so East's 4♦ shows the ♦A. West bids 4♠ showing first round spade control but denying a first round heart control. East jumps to 6♣, indicating that he has first round heart control and other extras than make the slam worth a shot.

West
♠ A K Q
♥ -
♦ K Q 3
♣ A K J 6 4 2

West East
1NT
3♣ 3♦
3♠ 4♥
4NT 5♠
7NT P

East has 22 HCP and is interested in a grand slam. He is missing two key cards. If partner has one key card it will be vital to know whether it is the ♦A or ♥A. RKCB won't tell him that, but it will help place the whereabouts of the ♣ Q. He bids 3♣ and is delighted when East bids 3♦, which must surely show the ♦A, and after West cuebids A East shows the ♥ A. West now knows that East has two key cards so uses RKCB to find out if East also has the ♣ Q. East obliges again so West confidently bids 7NT.

Note that in a minor you need one extra card in your long suit (SQT= 9+) and two more HCP. With just five good cards and 16 HCP you would just blast to 3NT. It is a little risky but your opponents have no information about your holding when making their opening lead. You may go off, but in duplicate you will be in good company.