

21 Balanced -- Problem

**Board 16**  
West Deals  
E-W Vul



♠ A 6 4  
♥ K Q J 8  
♦ A K 2  
♣ A 7 3

West	North	East	South
<i>ptownsd</i>	<i>skerr356</i>	<i>PeteM</i>	<i>mattress27</i>
1 ♠	Pass	?	

Join me as East for this huge but flat responding hand. Here is what our strong-hand responses mean:

2 ♣ or 2 ♦ -- forcing to game with at least four cards in the bid suit.

2 ♥ -- forcing to game with at least five hearts.

2 NT -- forcing to game with a balanced hand and at least four spades (Jacoby).

3 ♣, 3 ♦ or 3 ♥ -- weak.

What would you recommend?

We were actually playing this:

3 ♣, 3 ♦ or 3 ♥ -- fit-showing: spade support, 5+ cards in the bid suit and invitational or slammish (but not game-only). The emphasis is on secondary values in the bid suit, looking for a fit to produce extra tricks.

Would you recommend 3 ♥ with only four of them?

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 West Deals  
 E-W Vul

21 Balanced -- Solution

	♠ 8 3					
	♥ 10 6 5 4 3					
	♦ 10 8 6 4					
	♣ Q 5					
♠ K Q J 7 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W   E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W   E	S	♠ A 6 4	
N						
W   E						
S						
♥ 2		♥ K Q J 8				
♦ Q J 3		♦ A K 2				
♣ K 9 6 4		♣ A 7 3				
	♠ 10 9 2					
	♥ A 9 7					
	♦ 9 7 5					
	♣ J 10 8 2					
West	North	East	South			
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1 ♠	Pass	6 NT	All pass			

All the forcing responses to 1 ♠ are flawed, when holding a strong hand with this precise shape. Assuming partner has 12 points, holding 21 HCP, we should have a play for 6 NT on power. That's what I bid.

At matchpoints, it is usually correct to lead a cashing ace against a slam, to prevent an overtrick. This tends to give up on setting the slam, but wins more tricks in the long run. After that lead, we claim the last 12 tricks. On some other lead, we would have won and knocked out the ♥ A for 12 tricks. If spades were 5-0, cashing the ♥ A might have allowed an otherwise unmakeable slam to come home.

The reason to do something other than 6 NT is to explore for a grand slam. In this context, let me list the acceptable responses, worst to best:

2 ♥ -- if partner hopes to set up hearts by ruffing in 7 ♠, he may be pleased that no ruff is needed. However, if partner raises hearts, many pairs play that spades can no longer be trump. 4 NT will not disclose the quality of partner's spades, which is crucial to making a grand slam.

2 NT -- partner may rely on our 4-card support, and take our 6 NT to a sketchy 7 ♠.

2 ♣ -- the usual lie in this situation, but partner may up-value the ♣ Q.

2 ♦ -- chunkier, and the ♦ Q will be a trick, but partner will be less likely to suspect we manufactured this bid.

6 NT -- this must show a hand that cannot be described with any of the above responses. It should have our 3=4=3=3 shape with 21 or 22 HCP and stoppers all around. On the other hand, there may be a grand slam on a good fit, for example 13 tricks opposite: ♠ K Q J 7 5 ♥ A ♦ Q 5 3 ♣ 9 6 4 2

3 ♥ -- the fit-showing jump shift does seem best. If partner bids 3 ♠ (signoff), follow up with 6 NT. Partner's 4 ♠ shows extra values and/or a fitting heart card (the ace): bid 4 NT; over a 5 ♠ (2-with) response, we count 12 top tricks. Best is to continue exploring for a 13th trick. 7 NT is acceptable, as either the ♦ Q or ♣ K would be 13 tricks. As with the 2 ♥ response, the problem comes when partner raises hearts. At least partner knows we also have spades, and may get it right when we bid 6 NT next.

**Board 17**  
North Deals  
None Vul

Missed Slam -- Problem

♠ A K  
♥ 10 5  
♦ A Q 6  
♣ K Q 9 5 4 2



♠ Q 6 3 2  
♥ A K  
♦ J 9 8 4  
♣ A 8 7

West	North	East	South
<i>jomomma22</i>	<i>PeteM</i>	<i>rras</i>	<i>ptownsd</i>
	1 ♣	1 ♠ <sup>1</sup>	2 ♠ <sup>2</sup>
Pass	3 ♠ <sup>3</sup>	Pass	3 NT

All pass

1. rras bids very aggressively against us.
  2. Limit raise or better.
  3. Forcing to game.
- 3 NT by South

We have 12 top tricks on a club split, and 7 NT turns out to be cold unless West is on lead and chooses a diamond. The 1 ♠ overcall messed us up. Had rras passed, South would respond 1 ♠, North would rebid 3 ♣, and slam should be reached.

Note that a good balanced hand with an iffy spade holding will often have to make a cue-bid-raise without a secure fit. South has the values to jump to 3 NT, but not the implied double spade stopper.

1. Assess the blame for not reaching slam.
2. State the line of play that makes 7 NT on a heart or spade lead. Be specific.

**Board 17**  
 North Deals  
 None Vul

Missed Slam -- Solution

♠ 5 4 ♥ Q 9 8 7 6 ♦ 7 3 2 ♣ 10 6 3	<table style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A K ♥ 10 5 ♦ A Q 6 ♣ K Q 9 5 4 2	♠ J 10 9 8 7 ♥ J 4 3 2 ♦ K 10 5 ♣ J
	N											
W		E										
	S											
		♠ Q 6 3 2 ♥ A K ♦ J 9 8 4 ♣ A 8 7										

West	North	East	South
<i>jomomma22</i>	<i>PeteM</i>	<i>rras</i>	<i>ptownsd</i>
	1 ♣	1 ♠	2 ♠ <sup>2</sup>
Pass	3 ♠ <sup>3</sup>	Pass	3 NT
All pass			
2. Limit raise or better.			
3. Forcing to game.			
3 NT by South			

1. 3 ♠ could be simply accepting the game try, looking for a spade stopper. South has a spade stopper, but not a slam-worthy one. South's 3 NT bid is clear, as the partnership is likely to have only about 29 combined HCP.

The fault was all mine, for my final pass. How should I have continued? 4 NT would be natural, showing a balanced hand too strong to open 1 NT, an underbid with the running clubs, but likely to reach slam this time. 4 ♣ would be forcing, with slam interest, the better bid. Slam will surely be reached after 4 ♣ on this deal, and 4 NT might still be played, otherwise. (I have a mental block on this 4 ♣ bid.)

2. Making 13 tricks is easy for an inveterate squeezer. East has five spades and the ♦ K. The key is to win the final squeeze card *with a heart*, preserving the ♦ A as the required entry to the diamond threat. Win the opening spade lead and lead to the ♣ A. (This lets us pick up ♣ J 10 6 3 with West, should East show out.) Run the clubs, *counting spades* and pitching three small diamonds. Play any of the ♠-A-K that remain, and then play any of the ♥-A-K that remain. This is the 4-card end position (West is irrelevant) -- play a heart:

♠ - ♥ 10 ♦ A Q 6	♠ J 10 ♥ - ♦ K 10
♠ Q 6 ♥ K ♦ J	

We count the spades; if the ♠ 6 is not good, then the ♦ K will drop under the ace. East's correct discard is the ♦ 10, hoping West has the ♦ Q or that declarer screws up. (An expert defender might have discarded the ♦ 10 earlier, and followed suit to the ♥ K.)