Minor Suit Slam? -- Problem

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A 10 8
♡ 2
◊ K 8 6 3 2
♣ Q 7 5 4

West	North	East	South
	PtownSD		*PeteM*
		Pass	Pass
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ◊[1]
Pass	2 NT[2]	Pass	?

1. Waiting.
2. 22-24 balanced.

Most pairs play the same systems in this situation as directly over a 2 NT opening. Most play that 3 ◊ and 3 ♡ are transfers to hearts and spades, respectively. The meanings of 3 ♣, 3 ♠ and 3 NT may differ.

1. Standard: 3 NT/4 NT/5 NT is to-play/inv/forcing. 3 ♣ is Stayman, asking for a 4-card major; a subsequent bid at four of a minor is natural and no longer promises major suit interest. 3 ♠ is minor suit Stayman (apparently great for this deal). 4 ♣ is Gerber. 4 ◊ and 4 ♡ are Texas transfers; 4 NT then asks for key cards. With 5-4 majors, responder bids 3 ♣ and over 3 ◊ shows the longer major, either bidding it, or if playing Smolen, by bidding the 4-card major. Transferring to a 5-card major and bidding the other shows 5-5.

2. Puppet Stayman: Same as standard, except 3 ♣ asks for a *five* card major. Opener's 3 ◊ says no, but I have one or both 4-card majors; to deny a four card or longer major, opener bids 3 NT. Responder may transfer into hearts and then bid spades, with four of them. As given, there is no good way for responder to show five spades and four hearts with these methods. That meaning can be assigned to a direct 3 ♠ or 3 NT over 2 NT, losing a useful bid or creating a pit trap (3 NT on cruise control).

Marshall Miles devised a Puppet Stayman system where responder bids 3 ♣ when holding zero or one four card major. Opener bids a 5-card major or otherwise 3 ◊; over 3 ◊, responder bids 3 NT/4 NT/5 NT or the major suit not held; this better conceals opener's hand. However, in order to make this work, responder's direct 3 NT/4 NT/5 NT raise of 2 NT promises both majors -- this is a pit trap, at least while learning it. Further wrinkles are described in *Modern Constructive Bidding* by Miles.

3. My methods are standard, except responder's 3 ♠ shows slam interest in either or both minors and requires opener to bid 3 NT. Over that, 4 ♣/4 ◊ sets the other minor as trump and asks for key cards (hugely superior to Gerber). With both minors, responder can bid 4 NT to show 2=2=(5-4) shape, or a major suit to show a singleton or void (and usually at least 5-5 in the minors). For more information, see my article, "Roman Keycard Blackwood, Delayed Kickback and Crosswood." This 3 ♠ bid is apparently not best for this particular deal.

How would you plan the bidding with your system?

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

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                    ♠ K Q 9 7 5
                    ♡ A K 3
                    ♢ A Q 7
                    ♣ K J
   ♠ J 6 4 3 2              N           ♠ —
   ♡ J 10 9 8 6       W          E      ♡ Q 7 5 4
   ♢ —                     S           ♢ J 10 9 5 4
   ♣ 8 6 3                              ♣ A 10 9 2
                    ♠ A 10 8
                    ♡ 2
                    ♢ K 8 6 3 2
                    ♣ Q 7 5 4
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West	North	East	South
	PtownSD		*PeteM*
		Pass	Pass
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♢[1]
Pass	2 NT[2]	Pass	?

  1. Waiting.
  2. 22-24 balanced.

With nine high card points, we may have a notrump slam on power. Most pairs would play a jump to 4 NT as quantitative: please bid on with a litle extra. Point-counters would pass with only 22 HCP, but some would up-value the spade suit and bid on. The correct method for this is *not* optional Blackwood, it's suits up the line. Since responder eschewed Stayman, it takes 4+ cards to bid a minor suit, but 5 cards to bid a major. If opener bids 5 ♠, the excellent spade slam will be reached. This is a solid approach that can also find a minor suit slam, but it does not include the value of the singleton heart.

Pairs that wheel out Puppet Stayman should also reach 6 ♠, but that's just luck. Puppet Stayman appears likely to miss a good minor suit slam, should that be the correct contract. The presence of Puppet Stayman in the system may have removed other tools for bidding minor suit slams.

Minor suit Stayman should produce a 3 NT bid by opener, denying a 4-card minor suit. So now try 4 NT, again quantitative. With such good cards in the minors, opener should accept. A 5 ♢ bid (showing a good three, having denied four cards) will result in a good diamond slam. Opener could also try 5 ♠ (reaching the spade slam), planning to bid 6 ♢ next.

Finally, playing my Crosswood-based methods, I could have tried 3 ♠, and followed up with 4 ♡ to show a singleton, over the required 3 NT. The meaning of 4 ♠ by opener was not discussed, but it should result in reaching a spade slam. In hindsight, I think this was the way to go, as we might play 6 NT as a last resort.

As you can see, both 6 ♠ and 6 ♢ are unlucky and should go down.

My confession: I dithered so long over the merits of 3 ♠ before deciding against it, that I felt time pressure and bid only 3 NT. For some reason, East led a fourth-highest ♢ 5 to declarer's ♢ 7, so 12 tricks were automatic with the marked spade finesse. If East leads a higher diamond, I think it's correct for declarer to assume East has no more than three spades, and take the ♠ A on the first round of the suit (again producing 12 tricks). Taking the ♠ K first, there are always 11 tricks, and East might be squeezed in the minors. My inferior 3 NT bid was incredibly lucky, winning 83.5% for making six, or 70.5% for making five. Sometimes, that's how it goes.