



Game Tries

Take a look at these two hands:

Hand A	Hand B
♠ A K Q 4 3	♠ A K Q 4 3
♥ A 7 6	♥ K J 5
♦ K J 5	♦ A 7 6
♣ 10 7	♣ 10 7

The only difference is in the red suits; surely these two hands are worth the same? In isolation they certainly are, but in the light of a few rounds of bidding things can change.

Give partner this hand:

Hand C
♠ J 10 7 2
♥ 3
♦ Q 9 3 2
♣ Q J 8 5

Now the two hands yield very different results.

Hand A fits beautifully with Hand C and should make ten tricks in spades, but Hand B and Hand C do not gel so well: a heart loser, two clubs and possibly two diamonds – you might not even make nine tricks.

But how can we tell the difference between such hands? We cannot always do it, but there are various opportunities when rather than simply inviting game we can describe our hand a little further.

The Game Try

When an uncontested auction starts 1♥ – 2♥, then you can be pretty sure that your side is happy playing in hearts, so you have no interest in looking for another fit. If you want to try for game, you might just bid 3♥, but this would

not be very descriptive and would not allow your partnership to see if the two hands fit together. Instead you should try to make a bid that allows your partner to see whether his hand fits with yours and thereby judge whether game is on.

All sorts of bids are now free for you to use: 2♠, 2NT, 3♣ and 3♦; you have already found a major suit fit, so these bids are used as game-tries. The type of game-try I prefer, because I think it allows for the greatest accuracy is the ‘Help Suit’ Game-try.

Choose a suit in which you need help and bid it; you should have two or more losers in it; a weak three-card holding is ideal. Now partner can judge whether he can get rid of those losers for you – if he also has a weak three-card holding he will know the hands do not fit well, and will sign off in 3♥, but if he had a singleton in your Help Suit then, being able to ruff your losers, he could jump to 4♥. Similarly, if he had a couple of good stoppers in that suit, he might elect to bid 3NT. (NOTE: this kind of game-try, which shows a weak suit of three or more cards, does not need to be alerted.)

Let us look at a couple of examples:

Deal 1							
♠ K Q J 4 3		♠ A 7 6 2					
♥ J 6 2		♥ 8					
♦ A K 9 4		♦ 10 8 5 3					
♣ 7		♣ Q 8 3 2					
	<table border="1"> <tr><td>N</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S		
N	E						
W	S						

West	East
1♠	2♠
3♥	4♠

Deal 2							
♠ K Q J 4 3		♠ A 7 6 2					
♥ J 6 2		♥ 10 8 5 3					
♦ A K 9 4		♦ 8					
♣ 7		♣ Q 8 3 2					
	<table border="1"> <tr><td>N</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S		
N	E						
W	S						

West	East
1♠	2♠
3♥	3♠

The two West hands are the same and the two East hands have their red suits swapped round.

The auctions start in exactly the same fashion: 1♠ – 2♠ and now West judges that he is worth a try for game; his singleton and solid suit make it a much better than minimum hand. If West simply bids 3♠ in either auction, then both Easts will bid in the same way, since they have no extra information to enable them to make a more accurate judgment.

However, you are a better bidder than that and you decide to invite game by making a game-try, picking a suit in which you need help. Your diamonds are excellent so you need little help there, but your hearts are distinctly weak and therefore that is where you should direct your partner’s attention. Bid 3♥; this says to partner: “Partner, I think there is a chance for game if you can get rid of my heart weakness.”

In Deal 1, East jumps to game: his singleton heart is ideal, he will be able to ruff your losing hearts.

In Deal 2, East is less satisfied: your descriptive bid has forewarned him of losing hearts in both hands, and thus he signs off in 3♠.

I hope that you can see that in Deal 1 game should be comfortable, losing just one heart, one diamond and one club. In Deal 2, there are three heart losers to go with a club. Your trial bid has allowed your partner to differentiate between the two hands.

More Examples

Here are two more deals:

Deal 3							
♠ K Q 8 2		♠ A J 5 4 3					
♥ Q 7 6		♥ 8 3 2					
♦ 7		♦ K J 5					
♣ A J 5 4 3		♣ Q 7					
	<table border="1"> <tr><td>N</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N	E	W	S		
N	E						
W	S						

West	East
1♣	1♠
2♠	3♥
3♠	

Continued on page 11 ►

Deal 4

♠ K Q 8 2		♠ A J 5 4 3
♥ 7		♥ 8 3 2
♦ Q 7 6		♦ K J 5
♣ A J 5 4 3		♣ Q 7

West	East
1♣	1♠
2♠	3♥
4♠	

A very similar set of hands, but this time it is the responder who makes the game-try. On both deals, after West shows a minimum hand by raising to 2♠, East quite rightly tries for game; with 11 points and a five-card suit he should have some hope, especially since his doubleton queen is in partner's first suit. With spades agreed, you can use a game-try and the suit you need help in is hearts. Thus East bids 3♥ and now West has to judge whether to bid game or not.

In Deal 3 West's hearts are poor: a queen can be valuable opposite a strong holding, but opposite weakness it is wasted. It seems that both hands have heart weakness and thus you finish the auction with 3♠.

In Deal 4 West has the perfect holding in the trial suit, a singleton, and therefore should jump to game. Notice how the queen in Deal 4 is opposite the strong diamond holding, and thus carries its full weight.

On Deal 3 you might go off in 3♠, but that would be a little unlucky; on Deal 4, on the other hand, you will make either ten or eleven tricks.

Things to Note

1. To judge your holding in the Help Suit:

Take your three highest cards in the suit and count its losers:

0 or 1 losers = bid game

2 losers = think about game

3 losers = sign off in 3-of-the-major

Remember that partner is inviting you to game, so if you have two

Other articles by Bernard Magee are at www.mrbridge.co.uk/Library.shtm

losers in the suit you should look at the whole of your hand and think whether you should accept a general invitation.

2. How do you know this is not a cue-bid?

Game-tries of this sort only come after a weak raise of a major (to the two level), so your aspirations are unlikely to go beyond game. Cue-bids tend to be at slightly higher levels when both hands have shown strength, e.g. after 1♠ – 3♠.

3. You must agree the major suit first. Do not forget that you can only make a trial bid when both players have bid the same major and thus have agreed on the trump suit.

4. You can finish in 3NT. When you have raised a major with three-card support, or when partner uses 2NT as a game-try, then you can bid 3NT with a suitable hand, e.g.

Deal 5

♠ A Q J 3		♠ K 5 4
♥ A 4		♥ Q 9 7 5
♦ A Q 10 2		♦ J 3
♣ 6 4 2		♣ Q J 5 3

West	East
1♠	2♠
3♣	3NT

East accurately raises to 2♠ rather than bidding 1NT, but over West's game-try he can bid 3NT, showing a stopper in clubs, a suitable hand for no-trumps, and quite likely only three spades.

Minor-suit Trial Bids

When you agree a major suit, you are reasonably sure that you want to play in that suit; the situation in the minor suits is very different. Because they are worth less and require eleven tricks to make game, one tends to avoid them and aim for no-trump contracts instead. Hence a new suit after a supported minor will tend to be an attempt to steer the partnership into no-trumps, as shown in the following examples:

Deal 6

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

West	East
1♣	3♣
3♦	3♥
3NT	End

Deal 7

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

West	East
1♣	3♣
3♦	3♠
4♣	End

The two West hands are the same and both East hands respond to the 1♣ opening by jumping to 3♣, showing their support and strength. Now West, with a good 15 points, wants to try for game; if his partner can stop the heart suit, 3NT is likely to be the best spot, so he shows his diamonds by bidding 3♦, hoping that his partner might show heart strength.

In Deal 6, East does indeed show hearts by bidding 3♥ and now West can close the auction by bidding 3NT; nine tricks are easy: five clubs, two hearts and two spades.

In Deal 7, once again West tries for no-trumps, but here East, without heart strength, responds 3♠ to show a spade stop instead. 3NT is no good now, so West signs off in 4♣.

These bids should be alerted because although they show strength, they do not show any particular length. You have no interest in playing in another suit because, had responder held a long major, he would have responded in it rather than supporting the minor straight away – the choice is between the minor and no-trumps.

Game-tries are a useful tool for finding thin games when your hands fit well together. It is one of the great pleasures of bridge that the auction can be like a pleasant conversation, feeling that you are able to get across all that you need to and thus being confident that you will arrive in the right contract. ■