

# Major Suit Game Tries and Raises at Bridge

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This article started as a fine plan for game tries that proved to be out of date. It then morphed into a comprehensive draft for both game tries and raises of major suit openings, detailing plans that were too complicated for most of us to actually play. Finally, we have a solid, playable plan, presented here in less than half the article.

In a case of the tail wagging the dog, the Appendix and the rest of the main text cover alternative methods, tests of game try methods, and related major suit raise situations – in less detail than the foregoing.

A discussion of the earlier plan leads to the new plan, which is: jump to game with a good game try, and with a lesser hand, minimize damaging information given to the opponents. For this plan to work well, we need a revamped system of raises, so that the strength of the simple raise is well defined. To some extent, responder makes (or refuses) the game try before opener gets a chance to make one.

All recommended methods are acceptable under the ACBL Basic Convention Chart, which both permits any jump response to be a raise of any strength, and permits the 1NT Forcing response.

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## Game Tries

When a major suit opening is raised to the two level, opener passes with an ordinary hand or jumps to game with a great one. Game tries involve partner in the decision. (On occasion, they are also used with slam interest.) This is the most basic game try structure:

1♠	2♠
Game Try	?

Game tries are telling or asking. The **direct game try** is the customary **telling game try**. Declarer makes a descriptive bid, and dummy decides whether to bid game or to sign off in three of the major. If dummy cannot decide, and there are one or more bids available below three of the major, he makes a counter-try. The opponents may profit from the knowledge they gain about declarer's hand for the entire defense.

With an **asking game try**, declarer bids the next step (2NT over 2♠ and 2♠ over 2♥, or less efficiently, 2NT over 2♥ as well), and dummy responds. Mostly the opponents learn about dummy. This can help them with the opening lead, but not much after that.

In addition, we have the **old college game try**: bid game and try to make it! In some quarters, this is known as the modern expert game try, often the best approach.

In Standard American bidding, the simple raise could be as few as five support points or as many as ten. Here are examples of minimum and maximum raises:

♠ 952	♥ AT62	♦ 73	♣ 8654	[an ace and a doubleton]
♠ Q52	♥ J96	♦ K73	♣ KJ94	[a flat ten high card points]

## Game Tries for Standard Raises

In the old days, the game try was usually 3♠. Responder would bid 4♠ with a maximum raise, and pass with a minimum. If both hands are relatively balanced, this method is reasonable. High card points work best for bidding balanced hands. However, if responder has a middling hand, he has no way to kick the problem back to opener.

Since the partnership intends to play this hand in spades, people started using other bids as game tries, to help responder resolve a close decision. The *trial bid* in a new suit, also called a *long-suit* or *help-suit game try*, was born. This approach is still standard, as described by William Root in 1986:

1. Bid 3 of the raised suit with good trumps. For example, after 1♠ – 2♠, bid 3♠ on ♠ AK9832 ♥ 76 ♦ AT ♣ K42, asking responder to bid game with a maximum hand.
2. Bid a new suit, for example, after 1♥ – 2♥, bid 3♣ on ♠ AKQ ♥ JT875 ♦ 4 ♣ AJ43. Responder must not pass; to refuse the invitation, he bids 3♥. Responder is asked to take his club holding into consideration.
3. Bid 2NT with a balanced or semi-balanced hand and stoppers on the side. Root's example for this bid is a minor suit auction: 1♦ – 2♦; 2NT on ♠ KT82 ♥ K5 ♦ AQJ74 ♣ AT.

The trial bid tells responder to especially value cards in the bid suit, as well as in trumps. However, the trial bid says nothing about the other two suits; and the fit in the side suits may be crucial, especially if opener is short in one of those suits. Here is why this method is poor:

	<i>Dummy</i>		
	♠ Q62		
	♥ 952		
	♦ KT62		
	♣ QT7		
<i>Declarer (1)</i>	<i>Declarer (2)</i>	<i>Declarer (3)</i>	
♠ KJT75	♠ KJT75	♠ KJT75	
♥ AQ8	♥ 4	♥ AJ43	
♦ 4	♦ AQ8	♦ AQ8	
♣ AJ43	♣ AJ43	♣ 4	

With either hand (1) or (2), declarer is supposed to make a trial bid of 3♣. With sure values in both trumps and the trial suit, plus a king on the side, dummy should accept the game try. Opposite declarer hand (1), 4♠ is ugly. If we can establish the ♦K, we may not have an entry to cash it. If we don't have that entry, we cannot take the club finesse. Only if the club finesse fails (or we yield a club), might we have a chance to take the heart finesse. Good luck avoiding a club ruff. The ♦K is worth, on average, less than half a trick.

Opposite declarer hand (2), 4♠ is likely to make, losing a trump, a heart, and perhaps a club. There is no trouble reaching dummy. In addition to being a sure entry, the ♦K is worth 1 ½ tricks, increasing the combined holding to three tricks, and the fourth diamond may prove useful, too. The most important card in dummy's hand may be the ♦K, and how it fits into declarer's hand, which the 3♣ trial bid does not address.

If we say declarer should have bid his ♦ AQ8 on hand (2) or (3), then, similarly, dummy cannot tell the value of the ♣ QT7. All three declarer hands have the same cards, just in different locations.

The *short-suit game try* was created to describe opener's shapely hands in one bid. Opener bids a singleton or void. As responder, we have useful information about all four suits. Treat the king, queen and jack of the short suit as if they were small cards. My method is to count useful features and act accordingly:

<b>Features</b>	<b>Action</b>
0 or 1	Sign off at three of the major
2	Make a counter try
3	Accept the game try
4 or more	Bid a singleton or void above three of the major with four trumps.

Exception: if we have ten high card points, but not in the right places to accept, consider bidding 3NT.

In other game try situations, we may not know how many features we need. In that case, fall back on *the simple method*: if, after discounting wasted cards, we still have our bids, accept the game try.

If we have two useful features, but there is no counter try available, bid game if our hand is worth a little more than two features, and sign off otherwise. Up-value for a fourth trump or any two honors in a key suit.

1♠	2♠
3♣ [short]	?

Suppose partner makes a short suit game try in clubs, and our hand is:

- ♠ xxx ♥ xxx ♦ xxx ♣ KQJx  
It does not get much worse than this. We probably have no tricks at all. Sign off in 3♠, and hope declarer can hold it to down one.
- ♠ Axx ♥ xxxx ♦ xxx ♣ KJx  
Here we have eight points, but only one useful feature (♠A). Partner said our clubs are paste. Sign off in 3♠.
- ♠ Txx ♥ xx ♦ KQxx ♣ xxxx  
This five point hand has two useful features in diamonds. Make a counter try of 3♦, showing our side strength. (Our doubleton heart is only a minor asset, with only three weak trumps.) Declarer might hold ♠ AK9xxx ♥ Kxx ♦ Axx ♣ x, or better.
- ♠ Kxx ♥ Jxx ♦ Jxx ♣ KQTx  
Compare to hand (A). In spite of having only one feature (plus two jacks) in a spade contract, we are likely to have game on power. Bid 3NT, and hope to take nine tricks. Opener may overrule us, but he has been warned.
- ♠ Qxx ♥ xx ♦ AJxx ♣ xxxx  
Only seven points, but the ♠Q and ♦A are gold. Either the doubleton or ♦J is likely to be useful. This is enough to jump to game.
- ♠ JTxx ♥ x ♦ AQxx ♣ xxxx  
This seven-pointer is worth a splinter to 4♥. We expect to take two diamonds and two ruffs. However, if partner has secondary (wasted) heart values, he will sign off, and we should respect that. Partner should ask for keycards with ♠ AKQxx ♥ Axxx ♦ Kxx ♣ x, but sign off with ♠ AQ9xx ♥ AQJx ♦ Kxx ♣ x.

**The direct short suit game try is most likely to get to the correct contract.** It tends to work as well as any other method, even when opener is has a second five-card suit. However, it is the wrong tool if opener has no singleton or two of them. We do need other game tries in our quiver.

The preceding is a solid approach that served me well for many years. However, the opponents are told about declarer's hand, and they may profit from the information. Consider this 4♠ contract, where dummy is hand (E) above:

*Dummy*

♠ Qxx  
♥ xx  
♦ AJxx  
♣ xxxx

*Declarer*

♠ AKxxx  
♥ KQx  
♦ KTxx  
♣ x

This looks like a fine contract that might be brought home on a red suit lead, even if trumps split 4-1. However, if the auction was 1♠ – 2♠; 3♣ [short] – 4♠, the opponents should start with two rounds of clubs. On this defense, if trumps don't split, the contract will usually fail; and it might fail, even if trumps do split. Reaching game with a short-suit game try reduces the chance of making the contract. Change declarer's small diamond into a spade, and the problem of the forcing defense objections largely disappears.

## Modern Game Tries

The rest of this article assumes that, for a first or second seat opening of one of a major:

1. The opening bid promises at least five cards in the major suit.
2. A response at the two-level in a lower ranking suit is forcing to game, or perhaps game-forcing unless that suit is rebid.
3. A response of 1NT is forcing, or as a second choice, semi-forcing.

This framework is known as *Two Over One Game Force*, or commonly, *Two Over One (2/1)*. If you are currently playing “Standard American” bidding, then your efforts should be better rewarded if you upgrade to Two Over One.<sup>1</sup> Come back here when you are comfortable with your new system.

## The New Strategy

The goal is to *achieve solid actual results* on hands with major suit fits. If we tell the opponents how to defend, it tends to cost us tricks, whether we reach a good contract or an inferior one. The new strategy has three prongs:

1. Adopt bidding methods so that responder expects the simple raise to provide two to three useful features for opener: no more, and no less. Therefore, with a hand that needs two features, opener jumps to game – no game try or counter-try needed – and little chance of missing a slam. A game try is only used to distinguish between the two and three feature hands.
2. Do not make a game try, unless we expect the process to be more valuable for us than for them.
3. The eventual declarer should often use an *asking* game try, to conceal information from the opponents.

The primary game try will be the next step: 2NT over 2♠, or 2♠ over 2♥. Here is what responder does:

- With scattered values and a minimum raise, responder signs off at three of the major. With scattered values and a maximum raise, responder jumps to game.
- When responder has values in only two or three suits, the value of specific secondary honor(s) may be crucial. Responder’s bid of a new suit shows secondary values, usually a holding of three or more cards containing a king or queen. Opener should continue to game if these values are working, or sign off, if not. KQx(x) is an excellent holding for this bid; AQx, KJx, Kxx and QJ9x are good; AJx is poor because the ace is always working: we would be talking about our jack.
- Over the nondescript game try, if responder shows secondary values in a suit, and opener signs off, responder usually passes. However, responder may shoot out 3NT with a maximum including a soft double stopper in the second suit. (Responder, with a maximum and a lesser stopper, might have jumped to game in the first place.)

Richard Pavlicek calls this a *relay game try* or a **nondescript game try**. The only time opener reveals his holding would be by implication (opener’s reaction to responder’s secondary value bid).

This game try works well, including much of the time when opener has a singleton. Pavlicek does not explain how this works; here’s how. Opener should be looking for a working minimum. With scattered values, the odds are that responder has a wasted value somewhere. A scattered maximum raise should

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<sup>1</sup> Some experts do quite well playing Standard American, but they are thin on the ground. Playing Two Over One well is actually easier than playing Standard American well, once you get the hang of it. You might start with Max Hardy’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century books in the Annotated References.

provide a working minimum, while a minimum will likely prove too weak. This is less than perfect, but it is better overall than other methods, because of the concealment.

Pavlicek recommends playing most other bids as slam tries only. However, with the narrowed range for the single raise, few hands will be worth a slam try. Here is the rest of our overall plan:

- Direct short-suit game (and slam) tries, because they are so accurate. However, it can tip a forcing defense, so use them sparingly:
  - When opener has six trumps (we have at least nine total trumps), or
  - When we have slam interest (a forcing defense tends to be less effective against slams).
 Remember, when hearts are trump, 2♠ asks:
  - Over 2♠, responder's 2NT shows secondary values in spades.
  - Opener's 2NT becomes a short-suit game try in spades.
- The re-raise asks for trumps and aces, with *five* losers. Opener has a hand that does not want any secondary values outside of trump, so responder's hand may not provide two actual cover cards. Of the game try examples given before, only hands (E) ♠ Qxx ♥ xx ♦ AJxx ♣ xxxx and perhaps (F) ♠ JTxx ♥ x ♦ AQxx ♣ xxxx should consider accepting a re-raise game try.
- Opener makes a slam try with a rare 4-loser hand, usually a game try, but possibly a jump shift.

## Game Try Summary

Game Tries over a Simple 2♥ or 2♠ Raise			
Declarer	Dummy	Declarer	Dummy
2♠/2NT	[1 <sup>st</sup> step]	<i>Nondescript game try.</i>	
	2NT	[♥ trump] Holding including secondary values in <i>spades</i> .	
	3♣/3♦	Holding including secondary values in the bid suit.	
	3♥	[♠ trump] Holding including secondary values in hearts.	
		<i>1<sup>st</sup> step</i>	<i>If available, the cheapest suit below 3 trumps asks:</i>
		3♥/3♠	[trump] Minimum, non-forcing.
		3NT	Maximum, choice of games
		4♥/4♠	[trump] Maximum, to play
	3♥/3♠	[trump] To play.	
		3NT	Maximum, double stopper concentration just below trumps.
	3NT	Choice of games	
	4♥/4♠	[trump] To play.	
	Other	Control bid (slam try).	
	Jump	A jump into a new suit is a splinter (slam try).	
	3♥/3♠	[agreed major] <b>Minimum, scattered values.</b>	
	3♠/3NT	[raise the ask] Flat hand with nine or ten distributed high card points.	
	4♣/4♦	I accept, and I have four trumps with a singleton or void in the bid suit.	
	4♥/4♠	[agreed major] <b>Maximum, scattered values.</b>	
2NT	[♥ trump] <i>Short-suit game try: singleton or void in spades.</i>		Use with a likely 9-card fit. Dummy's 3NT = about ten points with a double stopper. Declarer often passes.
3♣	<i>Short-suit game try: singleton or void in clubs.</i>		
3♦	<i>Short-suit game try: singleton or void in diamonds.</i>		
3♥	[♠ trump] <i>Short-suit game try: singleton or void in hearts.</i>		
3♥/3♠	[re-raise] <i>Trump-suit game try: declarer seeks two winners in trumps and side aces.</i>		
3NT	Strong balanced hand (choice of games).		
higher	Long suit slam try, seeking three winners only in trumps, side aces and the bid suit.		

We should not need any inquiries by opener over the secondary value bid. However, in a different raise situation, where the raise won't be defined so accurately, an inquiry may be useful. Accordingly, 1<sup>st</sup> step inquiries are shown (in italics and - - -) in the chart.

The reader may recognize this scheme as Kokish (Nagy) game tries, with the asking bid replaced with the superior nondescript game try; also avoiding the short suit game try with a 5-3 trump fit.

Pavlicek recommends:

*The [relay game try] structure applies any time a major suit is raised from one to two. This can be a raise of a major-suit opening, a one-level response, a one-level rebid or a one-level overcall. It also applies after a Drury 2 ♣ response, a 2♦ rebid and a 2M rebid by Drury bidder.*

*It also applies in competition provided there is no enemy bid after the raise to two [i.e. applies over a double of the raise].*

Other game try situations are discussed later. See the Appendix for information about the many game try methods not discussed here.

**Jump Shift Slam Try.** A strong one-suiter with four losers would usually be opened 2♣, so opener probably does not hold that hand. However, a two suiter usually requires a three-loser hand to open 2♣, because each new suit by opener is forcing. Opener usually makes a game try with such a hand and proceeds to slam opposite an acceptance; responder should cover three losers.

If opener has two suits with no secondary losers in the side suits, responder may not actually cover two losers. Opener's jump shift over responder's raise shows this hand. Opener asks responder to count only aces, plus secondary honors in trumps and the bid suit. With three cover cards, slam should be bid: ask for key cards, if possible. After responder raises to 2♠, jump to 4♦ holding:

♠ AQJ973 ♥ 2 ♦ KJT7 ♣ AK.

We have a slam opposite any three of ♠K, ♥A, ♦A and ♦Q. However, lesser honors in clubs or hearts are probably worthless. Responder may have ♠K and an ace for two sure winners; 4♦ is hoping for the ♦Q as well. Change opener's hand to:

♠ AKT973 ♥ 2 ♦ AQJx ♣ A J

A club honor would be useful, as well as the ♦Q, so a 4♦ slam try would be wrong. Bid 3♥, a slam try that looks like a game try.

**Magic Slams.** If responder has a strong side suit, we might have a magic slam, for example:

♠ K43 ♥ T82 ♦ KQT82 ♣ 64

If opener bids 2NT over our minimum 2♠ raise, we want to be in game only when partner likes diamonds. Accordingly, we bid 3♦. If opener moves toward slam, our repeat of diamonds shows this hand.

If opener instead makes a short-suit game try in clubs or hearts, we bid 4♦ to show this hand. In either case, a super-fit may even produce a grand slam.

## The Nondescript Game Try in Action

Let's return to the earlier example:

	<i>Dummy</i>		
	♠ Q62		
	♥ 952		
	♦ KT62		
	♣ QT7		
<i>Declarer (1)</i>	<i>Declarer (2)</i>	<i>Declarer (3)</i>	
♠ KJT75	♠ KJT75	♠ KJT75	
♥ AQ8	♥ 4	♥ AJ43	
♦ 4	♦ AQ8	♦ AQ8	
♣ AJ43	♣ AJ43	♣ 4	

All three declarers hold the same cards, in different suits. With 15 HCP and a singleton, each hand is clearly worth further action. Holding only five spades, declarer chooses the nondescript game try of 2NT. This minimum dummy will sign off. Declarer (2) will miss a desirable game – a short-suit game try (3♥ in this case) really can reach better contracts – but the 3♠ contract will be reasonable in all cases. The opponents will be given no tip on the defense.

If we replace a low heart with the missing king or queen of hearts, dummy will accept in the game try. The 4♠ contract will be fine in all three cases. The ♥K fills in that suit for Declarer (1); the heart honor is mostly wasted for Declarer (2), who does not care; and the heart honor adds a full trick for Declarer (3). In these cases, we reach our obvious games, and stay out of bad ones.

# Raising the Major Suit Opening

## Hand Evaluation

High card points are not sufficient for modern raises. We need to refine the concept of “useful features” from the game try section.

## Losing Trick Count

If we have trouble deciding whether or not to try for game, the Losing Trick Count (LTC) can help. Using this method, each of the first three cards in a suit is a *loser*, if it is not an ace, king or queen. Cards fewer than three are not losers, but droppable honors are. Strictly speaking, *the losing trick count applies only when an 8-card trump fit is found*, but players often make a preliminary evaluation of an unbalanced hand in losers. A minimum opening bid in a major suit typically has 7 losers.

Losing trick count does not appeal to me as a primary method, because it counts all three top honors in a long suit as having the same value. Both these hands have five losers, one in each major, plus three in the minors:

1. ♠ KQxxx ♥ KQxxx ♦ x ♣ xx
2. ♠ AKxxx ♥ AKxxx ♦ x ♣ xx

After a raise to 2♠, hand (1) has a decent chance of making game only opposite the two major suit aces, or a better hand. Hand (2) only requires two queens, or an ace and a queen, or ....

Few players would consider game with hand (1), but most would with hand (2). The best approach is to first use points to see if we are within range of game, and then apply the losing trick count. Counting the singleton as three points, after partner raises, hand (1) counts about 13, clearly too weak, and hand (2) counts about 17, clearly in range of game; we'll see that with 5 losers, this is a jump to game.

It's important to understand that LTC is counting distribution, by treating cards beyond three in a suit as non-losers. For example, a 4-4-3-2 hand with the same high cards in the long suits usually has one fewer loser than a 4-3-3-3 hand. Similarly, 5-4-2-2 or 5-4-3-1 typically has one fewer loser than 5-3-3-2. None of my references state this explicitly.

Any method of hand evaluation can produce disappointing results when values are duplicated, for example, counting both distribution and high cards in the same suit, between the two hands of the partnership. We want to minimize such effects.

## Cover Cards

A *cover card* is a card or distributional feature in responder's hand that is expected to cancel out one of opener's losers. Responder's cover cards may change, depending on opener's actions. Cover cards were loosely described as “useful features” when discussing game tries.

More information on LTC and cover cards is in the Appendix.

We need to introduce a new concept. A **sure cover card**, which I'll call a **winner** for convenience, will cover a loser in declarer's hand, even if declarer has a singleton in the worst location.

1. The king or queen of trump, or any ace, is a *sure honor cover card*, or an *honor winner*.
2. Assume opener has a singleton in the worst possible location, and consider the other two plain

suits. Each king or queen there is a sure honor cover card. Count our own shortness in those two suits, in combination with trump length: a doubleton with four trumps or a singleton with three trumps is one winner. A singleton with four trumps may be worth two winners, depending on partner's holding.

Here are some sample dummy hands after partner opens 1♠:

- a. ♠ Kxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [two sure covers]
- b. ♠ Qxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ Qxxx ♣ Jx [two sure covers: ♠Q and ♦Q; plus a jack]
- c. ♠ Axxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [two sure covers: ♠A, doubleton with four trumps]
- d. ♠ Qxx ♥ AQxx ♦ xxxx ♣ xx [two sure covers: ♠Q and ♥A, plus ♥Q and doubleton]
- e. ♠ Qxx ♥ KQxx ♦ xxxx ♣ xx [one sure cover: ♠Q; ♥KQ, doubleton, 8 support points (SP)]
- f. ♠ Qxx ♥ KQxx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx [one sure cover: ♠Q; ♥KQ, 7 support points (SP)]
- g. ♠ xxx ♥ KQxx ♦ KQxx ♣ xx [two sure covers: ♥KQ or ♦KQ; 11 support points (SP)]

For a given number of cover cards or sure cover cards, a hand may be good or bad. Uncounted values make the hand a little better. Each counted queen makes the hand a little worse. Remember that *losers and cover cards apply only to a suit contract, when a fit of eight or more cards has been found*. High card points are usually the best way of evaluating balanced hands; LTC assumes increasing importance with more distributional hands.

Responder's simple raise of opener's major suit should provide two to three sure cover cards, or equivalent points. Opener can bid confidently when responder's strength is well defined. Example hands (a) thru (e) are all simple raises. Hand (e) is borderline, (f) is too weak, and (g) is too strong. Note that if opener has length in hearts, hand (f) contains three winners and is worth accepting a game try!

Looking back at “

The Nondescript Game Try in Action,” the dummy of ♠ Q62 ♥ 952 ♦ KT62 ♣ QT7 is a bare minimum simple raise, with two sure cover cards, both queens (assuming the ♦K is wasted). Add the ♥K, and we have three sure cover cards: ♠ Q62 ♥ K92 ♦ KT62 ♣ QT7, a maximum simple raise.

## Minimum Raises

For our game try plan to work correctly, opener must be able to count on responder providing two winners for the simple raise. For this we use two minimum raises, plus preemptive raises.

## The Slow-Down Raise

A partscore will often play better in a 5-2 fit in opener’s major than in 1NT, a foundation of the “forcing notrump” approach. We frequently require responding 1NT when holding *three* cards in opener’s major. If opener were to pass 1NT, we risk getting a bad board by missing an eight card major suit fit. Therefore, with these methods, playing the 1NT response as *forcing* should be better than *semi-forcing*.<sup>2</sup>

One of my favorite tools I call the **slow-down raise**. Consider this auction:

1♠	(Pass)	1NT [forcing]	(Pass)
2♦	(Pass)	2♠	?

Usually, responder’s bid is a suit preference, with a doubleton. As a result, opener is less likely to be interested in game, and more likely to pass. On the flip side, since we have not announced a fit, the Law of Total Tricks<sup>3</sup> says the opponents should be cautious about competing to the three-level. With this auction, everybody tends to slow down.

The slow-down (bad) raise hides within this preference mechanism. We respond 1NT and then try to play in partner’s major at the two level. Use this with any hand that is too good to pass, but not good enough for a simple raise. A key issue to discuss with partner: when opener rebids 2NT over our 1NT response, we should agree that a return to opener’s major shows a slow-down raise. *Everyone who plays the 1NT response as forcing should employ the slow-down raise.*

The slow-down raise is usually made with 3-card support. Hand (f) above (♠ Qxx ♥ KQx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx) is a maximum slow-down raise. With a really bad hand and four card support (at most one sure cover card and usually less than seven HCP), also use the slow-down raise. Remember, we want something like two sure cover cards for a simple raise. This example would be a maximum for a 4-card slow-down raise:

♠ Axxx ♥ Qxx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx [only one sure cover card]

We will still get to game, if opener gives us the jump shaft. These hands are worth a simple raise:

♠ Axxx ♥ Qxxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [If ♥Q is wasted, a ruff should produce a second trick.]

♠ Qxxx ♥ Axx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx [two sure cover cards, but no doubleton]

## The Simple Raise & Opener’s Actions

The **simple raise** is *semi-constructive*, meeting one of these descriptions:

- The **3-card constructive raise** provides 6 to 10 HCP, three card support, and either two sure cover

<sup>2</sup> The ACBL Basic+ convention chart and the General Convention Chart it superseded, allow playing Drury only by a passed hand. This restriction is not present in the Open chart, so we may start seeing Drury-like or other artificial 2-level bids in any seat, removing the invitational 3-card raise from the 1NT response. Because of the slow-down raise, the playing 1NT response as *forcing* should still be better.

<sup>3</sup> See Larry Cohen in the Annotated References.

cards (two to three actual cover cards), or 10 support points.

- The **minimum 4-card raise** provides about 5-7 HCP, four card support, and either a doubleton with 1 or 1 ½ sure cover cards, or a flat hand with 1 ½ to 2 cover cards. The extra trump should give this hand the playing strength of the minimum 3-card constructive raise.

As we have seen, over a simple raise, opener jumps to game with about 5 losers. Two sure cover cards will reduce that to 3 losers, which should mean ten winners (a game), assuming normal splits and average finesse results. If the outlook turns out to be dim, hope for the opponents to help – they are in the dark.

We'll use other raises, so a simple raise will seldom provide four actual winners. As a result, opener should only try for slam over a simple raise with a rare four-loser hand, where three cover cards are needed.

With about 6 losers, opener makes a game try, as described earlier. Responder must have three cover cards, or a maximum in high cards, to accept.

## Preemptive Raises

A jump to game in opener's major is weak. Except at favorable vulnerability, this bid should provide both five card support and a singleton or void. If the response of 3NT is available,<sup>4</sup> play it shows a hand meeting the same requirements as a jump to game, but with a side ace or protected king. Then the jump to game denies such a side card.

Many partnerships play a jump to three of the major in competition as **weak 4-card raise**. Some play this way without competition. If we hold such a hand, then we choose a slow-down raise, simple raise, mixed raise, or pass.

## Non-Minimum Raises

### The Mixed Raise

A key tool is the **mixed raise**, a hand with at least four card support and strength between a preemptive raise and a limit (game-invitational) raise. Others describe this as a hand with some offense and some defense, or a **4-card constructive raise**. Playing Bergen Raises,<sup>5</sup> 3♣ (or perhaps 3♦) is a mixed raise. The purpose of the mixed raise is two-fold: it removes the hand as a possibility for a simple raise; and it is both effective and hard to defend against, especially when employed as a jump raise.<sup>6</sup>

When one partner opens or overcalls, the other partner should have a mixed raise available. For maximum effect, I follow the lead of Ken Eichenbaum, and define:

***The jump raise of partner's opening bid or overcall is always a mixed raise.***

How dominant is your auto-pilot? If a weak jump raise will come flying out of your bidding box in

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<sup>4</sup> Common choices for the 3NT response include, in decreasing order of usefulness to us: (1) a minimum 4-card forcing raise [recommended in our plan], (2) a game-preempt with a side ace or king, (3) a *void splinter*, or (4) a balanced game force with a specific range and shape, such as 4-3-3-3 with 16-17 HCP.

<sup>5</sup> Bergen Raises are described in the Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Weinstein and Dan Wolkowitz say the jump mixed raise of 3 trumps is particularly difficult to defend against: the contract may be made, the defenders may be able to make something (even a game), or the defenders may be in trouble if they bid. However, in some situations, Weinstein and Wolkowitz do use the jump raise as preemptive; then the bid one step lower is the mixed raise. Whether an opponent's mixed raise is natural or artificial, double should be takeout. When the bid is below three of the trump suit, the double is less risky.

competition, it's better to play that way. Instead, agree to use a jump cue bid at the three level and/or a jump into the suit below partner's, as the mixed raise in competition.

The mixed raise has about the same high card strength as a minimum constructive 3-card raise, but is slightly stronger because of the extra trump. The hand should contain a doubleton, but no singleton. Because there is no room for a game try, we further define:

***A mixed raise should contain exactly two sure honor cover cards, plus a doubleton. A hand with ten support points (SP) but fewer sure cover cards also qualifies.***

Here are some mixed raises of a 1♠ opening:

- ♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [minimum: four trumps, two sure covers, and a doubleton]
- ♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ QJx ♣ xx [maximum: four trumps, two sure covers, ♦QJ & doubleton]
- ♠ Qxxx ♥ KJxx ♦ Qxx ♣ xx [good: four trumps, two sure covers, ♥KJ & doubleton]
- ♠ Axxx ♥ KJxx ♦ Jxx ♣ xx [four trumps, one sure cover, but 9 HCP and a doubleton (10 SP)]

Weaker hands that *do not qualify* are simple raises:

- ♠ Axxx ♥ Qxxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [minimum: only sure honor cover is ♠A]
- ♠ Axxx ♥ KJxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [maximum: only sure honor cover is ♠A (9 SP)]

Stronger hands that *do not qualify* are limit raises:

- ♠ KQxx ♥ Axxx ♦ xxx ♣ xx [minimum limit raise: three sure covers, and a doubleton]
- ♠ Axxx ♥ KJxx ♦ Qxx ♣ xx [only two sure covers, but 10 HCP and a doubleton (11 SP)]

It's better to have our kings and queens in trumps, and our aces on the side, for offensive purposes.

## The 3-card Limit Raise

The **3-card limit raise**, sometimes called a 2 ½ raise or a bad limit raise, starts with 1NT [forcing] and then a raise to three of the major. This promises 11-12 support points. The hand should be too strong for a constructive raise, but too weak to force to game. Sometimes it makes sense to use this raise with four bad trumps and 4-3-3-3 distribution.

## Standard Game-Forcing Raises

The standard 4-card forcing raise is 2NT, the **Jacoby 2NT** convention. Responder will frequently have a balanced hand. We'll talk more about this forcing raise later.

The **game-forcing 2/1**: with three card support, bid a lower ranking suit at the two-level, and then raise opener's major. Responder also uses this approach with 4-card support and a side suit containing substantial strength, especially secondary honors.

The **game-forcing splinter**, which we'll also call a **game-splinter**, is a double jump shift (4♣, 4♦ or 4♥ over 1♠; 3♠ over 1♥) showing four or more trumps and a singleton or void in the bid suit. High card strength for the splinter bid should be enough to force to game, but not enough to drive toward slam, about 12 to 14 HCP. Responder should have strength in all three long suits; otherwise use either a primarily balanced forcing raise or make a 2/1.

While we could go into detail about these methods, most 2/1 pairs already play them. I highly recommend Serious 3NT slam methods (a topic for another day), when a major suit fit is confirmed after a 2/1, and after Jacoby 2NT – *not fast arrival*, a slam killer.

## Mini-Splinter (and Slam-Splinter)

Responder's *mini-splinter* is jump shift into a singleton or void, too strong for a simple raise but not strong enough to force to game. Such a hand offers a strong possibility of providing at least four winners. A mini-splinter contains either of these:

1. Two sure honor cover cards, at least four trumps, and a singleton or void (possibly two winners).

This is a mini-splinter over a 1♠ opening:

♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ xxxx

♠ AQxx ♥ Jxxx ♦ x ♣ Txxx

2. Two sure honor cover cards, three trumps, a singleton or void (one winner), and strong potential for a fourth winner, the ♣K in example:

♠ Qxx ♥ Axxxx ♦ x ♣ Kxxx

The examples above are minimum mini-splinters. A maximum mini-splinter is just short of a game force:

3. Two sure honor cover cards, at least four trumps, a singleton or void, and strong potential for a *fifth* winner, the ♣K in this example:

♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ Kxxx

A *slam-splinter* is a hand that has at least some slam aspirations over the opening bid, for example, over a 1♠ opening:

♠ KQxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ AQxx

♠ KQxx ♥ Axxx ♦ - ♣ Axxxx

We'll talk more about distinguishing the slam-splinter from the game-splinter. The key factor is the slam potential of the hand. For example, even with its 15 high card points, this is a maximum game-splinter:

♠ KQJx ♥ KQJx ♦ x ♣ Kxxx

***Responder's jump shift over a major suit is either a mini-splinter or a slam-splinter.***<sup>7</sup>

Either invitational or slamming, the jump shift excludes the game-splinter (the double jump shift).

Over a 1♠ opening, bid 3♦ with these hands:

- A. ♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ xxxx [minimum 4-card mini-splinter]
- B. ♠ Qxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ KJxxx [minimum 3-card mini-splinter]
- C. ♠ Qxxx ♥ KQxx ♦ x ♣ KTxx [maximum mini-splinter]
- D. ♠ Kxxx ♥ AKxx ♦ x ♣ AQTx [slam-splinter]

Over the mini-splinter, opener can inquire as to range by bidding the next step (3♥ over 3♦ here):

- With a minimum (A or B), responder signs off at three of the major.
- With a maximum mini-splinter (C), responder bids 3NT, saving room for cue bidding.
- With a slam-splinter (D), responder bids the cheapest first or second round control.

We'll see this after responder's other artificial raises: 3NT for game values and cue bid for slam values.

Responder's mini-splinter does not suffer the downside of the short-suit game try. Dummy makes the

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<sup>7</sup> After a major suit opening, when the opponents have not bid a suit, the mini-splinter is excellent. In all other situations, I prefer fit-showing jump shifts: either invitational or slamming; but in competition, always invitational.

mini-splinter, and the opponents will see that hand anyhow, after the opening lead. Also, we have nine trumps, making a forcing defense unlikely; besides, dummy will ruff in the short hand. Yes, the opponents may double to suggest a sacrifice, but partner should get a bid before they actually do save.

**Responder's short suit is just below trumps.** Over the mini-splinter just below trumps, there is no room to ask about strength. Here is the solution:

***A mini-splinter just below trumps is always a minimum.***

Because the maximum mini-splinter is fundamentally a limit raise, in the suit below trumps, we'll instead choose either a balanced limit raise or perhaps a game-splinter.

It would be a substantial distortion to bid the mini-splinter as a simple or mixed raise. We need the mini-splinter to take this potential 4- or 5-winner hand out of those raises.

### 4-Card Limit and Forcing Raises

You may have noticed that, when playing direct mini-splinters, mixed raises, and Jacoby 2NT, there is no room for a **4-card limit raise**. The modern solution is to merge the limit raise into the forcing raise.<sup>8</sup>

Over this combined raise, opener's first responsibility is to sign off at three of a major with a hand that would refuse a limit raise.

3NT response should be the bid for a minimum game force with 4-card support (frequently balanced). Then Jacoby 2NT is used with invitational or slam-potential hands only. This is a particularly good fit, as opener's shortness rebid will serve either as a short-suit game try over a limit raise, or as a slam try. The main reasons to not play this way are that your auto-pilot will bid 2NT instead of 3NT, and/or you prefer 3NT to show a maximum game-preempt, as described above.

### Mini-Splinter Framework Summary

Mini-Splinter Framework of Major Suit Raises				
R1	O2	R2	O3	
1NT	[forcing] may contain a slow-down raise, shown by suit preference, or a 3-card limit raise, shown by raising to the three-level.			
2other	Two over one: subsequent raise is forcing to game.			
2trump	Semi-constructive raise, expecting to provide two to three 3 winners (no more, no less): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4- card support, 5-7 HCP, and either one sure cover card and a doubleton, or up to two sure cover cards and 3-3-3; or</li> <li>• 3-card support with 2 to 3 sure cover cards, or 9-10 SP.</li> </ul> With enough points to consider game, opener counts losers: 7=pass, about 6 = game try, about 5 = bid game, 4 (rare) = slam try.			
2NT	LR+: 4+ trumps, often balanced, limit raise or slam potential. With LR strength, possibly short in the suit below trump.			
	3other	Singleton or void in bid suit.		
		3trump	Limit raise with wasted values, non-forcing.	

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Gumperz asserts this method tends to protect the auction from interference, since frisky opponents now risk going for a number against a partscore. The Appendix outlines an adjusted version of his structure over an expanded Jacoby 2NT.

An alternative is to merge the limit raise into the cheapest mini-splinter. This is not as useful. There is already plenty to sort out, among the mini-splinters.

		3NT	Game-forcing, without serious slam interest.
		Other	Cue bid, serious slam interest.
	3trump		Refuses limit raise (usually balanced).
	3♠		[♥ trump] Singleton or void, forcing to game.
	3NT		Accepts limit raise, at most 17 support points, balanced.
	4♣/4♦		Cue bid, serious slam interest, often a balanced hand.
JS	Mini-splinter: A jump shift shows 4+ trumps, a singleton or void in the bid suit, at least two sure honor cover cards, and either less than game-forcing strength or an immediate slam try. In the suit just below trump, it also denies limit raise strength (bid 2NT instead).		
	1 <sup>st</sup> step	If the next available bid is below 3trump, then it asks:	
		3trump	Minimum values.
		3NT	Limit raise values.
		Other	Slam try.
	3trump	Refuses any invitation.	
	3NT	Accepts game, no slam interest.	
	4♣/4♦	Cue bid, serious slam interest.	
3trump	Mixed raise: 4+ trumps; 2 sure honor winners and a doubleton, or 9-10 support points.		
3NT	Minimum game force, frequently balanced: 4+ trumps, about 13-16 support points.		
DJS	Game-splinter: The double-jump shift is game-forcing, 4+ trumps, about 12 to 14 HCP, singleton or void in bid suit.		
4trump	Preemptive raise: except possibly at favorable vulnerability, should have both 5+ trumps and a singleton or void, no side A or Kx.		

## Using Controls to Select a Game Force

Each ace is worth two controls, and each king is worth one. Using this method, a slam usually requires holding at least ten of the twelve possible controls.

The 3NT minimum game force and the game-splinter promise about 12-14 HCP. It helps to consider controls as well. We require five or more controls for the strong raise (2NT or a jump shift).

Some pairs count the queen of trump as a control; others also count the king of trump as two controls. With 14 such controls in the deck, require six or more controls for a strong raise.

## A Flexible System of Raises

This system uses lots of bids, but if one or two are needed for something else, the system still works:

- Go ahead and play an invitational or a Tucker 2♠ response – make a limit raise or mixed raise instead of a mini-splinter in spades (which might have encouraged a save, anyhow).
- Go ahead and use 3NT to show a preempt to game with a side ace or king – bid 2NT with a minimum balanced game force.
- Go ahead and play preemptive jump raises – make a simple raise or possibly a 2NT limit raise with a mixed raise.

## Passed Hand Raises

We play *reverse two-way reverse Drury*, often shortened to reverse two-way Drury, when partner opens

a major suit in third or fourth seat.<sup>9</sup>

Raising Opener's Major as a Passed Hand				
R1	O2	R2	O3	
1NT	[semi-forcing] may contain a slow-down raise, shown by giving a preference.			
2♣	4-card limit raise, may have a short suit.		Same continuations	
2♦	3-card limit raise.			
	2♦	[over 2♣] A full opening, likely balanced, wants responder to take charge.		
		2♥/2♠	[trump] Minimum hand. Opener may now use a game try.	
		Higher	Game tries, as over a simple raise, but by responder.	
	2♥/2♠	[trump] No interest in game. Responder may still use a game try.		
	Higher	Game or slam tries, as over a simple raise.		
2♥/2♠	[raise] semi-constructive simple raise, as usual.			
2♥	[♠ opened] 2♥ by anybody is natural and encouraging, but non-forcing.			
2♠	[♥ opened] Unchanged.			
2NT	5-5 minors (if normally GF). Otherwise, unchanged.			
higher	Unchanged.			

Both 2♣ and 2♦ are raises, so we play our full set of game tries over those bids. Because responder's bid shows limit raise strength, opener needs less for the game try. The 2♣ raise promises four cards, so opener should use the short suit game try freely over it.

If opener rebids 2♦, responder now can make the game try, again using the SSGT freely. Opener will usually rebid 2♦ on any balanced full opener, to encourage responder to show a singleton. On a rare occasion, responder may use a game try over a signoff as well. That is, any bid by either partner beyond two trumps is a game try, using our usual methods.

This reverse two-way Drury should be superior to the major suit raises used after an opening in first or second seat.

## Competition

The jump raise remains a mixed raise in competition (auto-pilot permitting). The cue bid shows a limit raise or better. The jump to game shows a hand with shape, too weak to cue bid.

Once the opponents bid a suit, the value of a shortness bid is reduced, because the partnership can often deduce shortness in the enemy suit. I recommend playing fit-showing jumps (FSJ) and fit-showing non-jumps (FSNJ, when obvious), once they bid a suit (and directly over our minor suit opening). The jump promises:

- A five-card or longer suit with emphasis on secondary honors: a holding of Axxxx or Jxxxx is definitely *not* an adequate FSJ suit. Think KQxxx, QJTx, AQxxx, etc. We are looking for a double fit. A misfit tends to align with penalty doubles.
- Support for partner's suit. Some partnerships require four cards (definitely over a minor suit),

<sup>9</sup> In original Drury, 2♣ was the only game try; rebidding the major showed a good hand, and 2♦ showed a bad one. As most pairs do, we reverse this. We also use two diamonds, because we especially want to know responder's trump length. Originally in two-way Drury, 2♦ showed four cards. We reverse this as well, to maximize space for the 4-card raise. Reverse two-way reverse Drury!

Pairs who play a weak 2♦ opening and prefer 1-way Drury should play Diamond Drury, usually providing 3-card support. This allows 2♣ to be natural and encouraging – often the last safe landing place over a light opening.

- others permit three.
- Invitational values. (A FSJ may be slamming, if employed without competition.) No mere game forces.

For more information on both fit-showing bids and mixed raises, refer to Robson and Segal in the Annotated References.

### **Our Opening Bid is Doubled**

When our major suit opening is doubled, we no longer have 1NT forcing, but we also no longer need to keep the auction open for partner. We can pass and back in later with a bad raise. We should also stretch some to make the semi-constructive simple raise.

Most pairs play Jordan 2NT (limit raise or better) over a takeout double of a major suit. Some partnerships promise only Qxx or better for this raise. Others require or encourage four-card support. With a three card holding that is deemed inadequate, we redouble, and then raise – at the risk of getting shut out by the opponents. My preference is Qxx or better at 2NT.

Decide whether mini-splinters and splinters are *on* (recommended), when they double our major suit opening. BROMAD, in the Appendix, is an alternative.

### **We Overcall in a Major – Jump Cue Bid**

Many partnerships use a jump cue bid at the 3-level (but below trumps) as a mixed raise. However, if the jump raise is a mixed raise, then the jump cue bid can be an invitational mini-splinter, with shortness in the enemy suit. As usual, it should be a minimum, if in the suit just below trumps. (Use the regular cue bid with a max, since that hand is at least invitational to game.)

As mentioned above, since they have bid a suit, advancer's jump into a new suit should be fit-showing.

### **After Responder's Simple Raise**

When responder's simple raise is doubled, systems are *on*. Redouble suggests penalty doubles, including the suit above or below ours. We play maximal doubles, except after this redouble.

Systems are *off*, if an opponent bids over the raise, and a re-raise is merely competitive. To make a game try, bid the most natural side suit available. When we open the bidding and they compete to three of the suit below our confirmed fit, a *maximal double* is the game try.<sup>10</sup>

If they double a suit-specific mini-splinter, pass is weakest. Bidding three of the trump suit asks for good trumps. Redouble shows the ace of the bid suit, with a game acceptance or better. 3NT accepts game, but denies the ace of the short suit.

### **Drury in Competition**

When we open in third or fourth seat, and the opponents make a takeout double or overcall 1♠ or 1NT, our Drury is *on*. When they bid 2♣ or higher, it is *off*. However, if we play them in competition, mixed raises remain in effect. Cue bid with a limit raise or better.

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<sup>10</sup> The primary situation for the maximal double: we open, they compete at three of the suit below our known fit. Partnerships often agree to extend maximal doubles to other specific situations, but need not do so.

## After Our Minor Suit Opening

### Opener Raises Responder's Major

1♣/1♦            1♥/1♠  
? [raise]

This situation is less flexible. With minimum opening bid values, opener/dummy must simply raise. Opener might have three-card support, so an eight-card fit is not assured. We need opener's other bids for various strong and weak hands without support. Here are opener's raises:

- The simple raise to two of the major shows a minimum opening bid. Four-card support is preferred, but honor-third and a ruffing value is permitted. (The partnership has probably already discussed this issue.)
- The jump raise promises four card support and about 16-18 support points. The jump into a new suit above the jump raise is a splinter. In addition to good four-card support, it shows 19 or more support points, including a singleton or void in the bid suit.
- The jump to four of opener's minor is the "raise without a name." In addition to strong four-card support, it shows a strong suit of six or more cards, and is forcing to game, for example, after 1♦ – 1♥, jump to 4♦ on:  
♠ xx ♥ AQTx ♦ AKQJxx ♣ x
- A jump reverse is three of a suit between opener's and responder's. This can, by agreement, have one of two useful meanings:
  - A game-invitational splinter, with four-card support. This may be standard.
  - A game-invitational hand with three-card support. This hand will be unbalanced and frequently have six cards in the minor. (If there is a choice, bid the suit with better values.) This convention may have originated in the Boston area; I have been playing it for years and highly recommend it. For example, after 1♣ – 1♥, jump to 3♦ on:  
♠ Kx ♥ AQx ♦ x ♣ AKJxxx
- Sometimes we can bid a strong hand with three card support by first using a reverse at the two-level. That's fine if a 4-card suit is nicely available for the purpose. It is risky business manufacturing a reverse into a 3-card suit, especially a major: we may find we now have a third opponent. The reverse itself, of course, does not promise any cards in responder's major.

Other than the jump reverse, this has been a rehash of standard bidding.

All the rebids that force to game should have at most five losers. Since the response may be minimum, opener's invitational bids show at most six losers – responder should accept with three likely winners.

### Responder's Game Tries

1♣/1♦/1♥            1♥/1♠  
2♥/2♠ [raise]            ?

The recommended game try structure works when opener's raise of responder usually provides 4-card support. Because reversing the dummy may be practical in a 4-4 fit, a short suit game try (even in opener's suit) might be selected more often.

If opener frequently raises with only three cards, it may be better for responder to have a different asking bid, showing exactly four trumps, to sort things out. All other bids should promise at least a 5-card major; help-suit game tries are prevalent, although the author prefers short suits.

In a scheme that appeared in the *Bulletin* a few years ago, 2NT is always the asking bid:

- 3♣ shows a minimum hand with three-card support.
- 3♦ shows a maximum hand with three-card support.
- 3♥ shows a minimum hand with four-card support.
- 3♠ shows a maximum hand with four-card support (always going to game).

Think: 3, 3, 4, 4. Responder may offer to play in opener's minor, perhaps passing opener's response. A new suit is forcing, either a stopper for notrump (3-card support) or a cue bid for slam (4-card support).

This scheme is often called *Spiral Raises*; there are several more complicated variations, usually using 2♠ to ask over hearts.

Consider this hand for responder:

♠ Jxxx ♥ AQx ♦ xxx ♣ KQJx

Partner opens 1♣, and raises our 1♠ response. A 2NT inquiry is fine, if opener shows four spades. What if opener has only three? There is a real chance that diamonds are wide open, yet we don't want to go past 3NT to suggest clubs. It could be right to pass a 3♣ response, sign off in 3♠, or bid higher. It's a guess.

This flavor of Spiral worked fine for me for years, with multiple partners, before I encountered such a deal. Most of the time, Spiral Raises are an advantage, but there are pathological cases.

For discussion and alternative raises, please see Gavin Wolpert in the Annotated References.

If we are having trouble deciding what to do, over opener's raise, fall back on LTC. 9 losers is an ordinary raise, so pass. 7 losers is typical of an opening hand; since an opening hand opposite an opening hand usually produces a game, we should usually bid one, if we have 7 losers and 8 trumps. (For LTC purists, add our 7 to partner's 7, and subtract from 24. We should be able to take 10 tricks.) Anyhow, invite game as responder with 8 losers.

## New Minor Forcing

New Minor Forcing and related conventions are used after opener rebids 1NT. Among other advantages, these methods reliably discover a 5-3 fit in responder's major (or a 4-4 fit in hearts). Since opener's hand is balanced, once a fit is discovered, the decision to bid game is tends to be made on high card points. Sophisticated game tries are not typically used or available.

Ken Eichenbaum recommends playing two-way checkback: 2♣ shows invitational values, and 2♦ is forcing to game, both artificial bids. I prefer two-way new minor forcing, in which opener is requested to bid 2♦ over 2♣, and responder passes with a bad diamond hand (or bids on with any invitation). I also like to extend this structure to any three bids at the one level, a convention called XYZ. Eichenbaum asserts that the game-forcing 2♦ bid is necessary for good slam bidding.

While I prefer XYZ, we can usually get by with old fashioned (one way) new minor forcing, if we play Eddie Kantar's rule:

***After bidding new minor forcing, responder's bid at the three level is forcing to game.***

Kantar's 3-level rule also applies if we play fourth suit forcing "for one round," my preference. This lets responder handle invitational hands without a stopper in the fourth suit. Fourth suit forcing is still needed, even when playing XYZ.

For more information on these methods, see my article, "Finding Major Suit Fits" in the Annotated References.

## Appendix

### **LTC and Cover Cards**

Various modifications can improve Losing Trick Count. For example, New Losing Trick Count (NLTC) tallies a missing ace as 1 ½ loser and a missing queen as ½ loser. Counting these new losers takes more effort, is error prone, and we don't need it for raises and game tries with the recommended methods.

Most LTC systems require us to count our losers, estimate partner's losers, add them up, and subtract from 24 (or 25 for NLTC). The result is the number of tricks we expect to be able to take with our suit as trump. We seldom need that either, for raises and game tries with the recommended methods: declarer (or the strong hand) counts losers, and dummy (or the weak hand) counts cards that cover partner's losers.

George Rosenkranz set forth an improved theory of **cover cards** many years ago:

*Any high card that is likely to annul one of partner's losers is a cover card:*

1. *Every ace and king counts as one cover card.*
2. *A queen counts as one cover card if partner is known to have at least three cards in the suit; otherwise she counts for only half a cover card.*
3. *When you hold four-card trump support for partner:  
A doubleton counts as half a cover card  
A singleton is worth one cover card  
A void is assessed as one-and-a-half cover cards*
4. *With only three-card support for partner's suit:  
A singleton is worth half a cover card  
A void is assessed as one cover card*

*Naturally, your cover card count must change as you learn more about partner's hand.*

Ken Eichenbaum offers these cover card modifications:

- Qx counts as 1 ¾ losers (¼ winner).
- Add ¼ loser to a suit headed by a king.
- Add ½ loser to a suit headed by a queen.
- Add ½ a winner for each trump beyond three.
- Four card multi-honor holdings are basically rated on their trick-taking potential, assuming declarer leads toward the suit as often as necessary (Eichenbaum provides a table).

### **Bergen Raises**

Most tournament players have encountered *Bergen Raises*. Marty Bergen's original plan includes:

- 2M     Constructive 3-card raise.
- 2NT    Game-forcing raise, usually balanced. [Jacoby]
- 3♣     Mixed 4-card raise.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The term *mixed raise* for the 4-card constructive raise is attributed to Marty Bergen; he first used it in his second book. Some pairs switch the meanings of the 3♣ and 3♦ responses. The original method (shown) is superior, because it always provides a bid below 3 trump to use as a game try over the mixed raise.

- 3♦ Limit 4-card raise.
- 3M Weak 4-card raise, 0-6 HCP (occasionally 5 cards).
- 3oM Undisclosed splinter (next step asks).
- 3NT Non-forcing 3-card raise (choice of contracts), usually 4-3-3-3 with stoppers.
- 4♣ Balanced raise, too good for 3NT, at least strong 3-card support.
- 4♦ 5-card preempt to game with decent values.
- 4M Weak 5-card preempt to game.

Not everybody plays the full system; even with all the features, it has these defects:

- The only splinter response is forcing to game. There are no tools to sort out responder's lesser hands with shortness.
- There is no way to separate game-splinters from slam-splinters.
- The responses are described mostly in points, rather than in winners or cover cards.

As a result, Bergen Raises are not particularly compatible with the recommended game try structure.

## **BROMAD**

The *BROMAD* acronym stands for Bergen Raises of Major after Double, that is, when they double our major suit opening bid. There are many versions, and I have never played any of them. Check it out online, or in Bergen's second book.

## ***Hardy Raises***

Max Hardy describes *Hardy Raises* in his *Advanced* book. Shortness here means a singleton or void.

- 2M Support with support.
- 2NT Game-forcing raise, balanced or unbalanced, with at least a good 15 HCP. [Jacoby]
- 3♣ Good limit raise, 10-11 HCP and either 3-card support with shortness or 4-card support without. The next step is a Mathe Asking Bid.
- 3M-1 [*under jump shift*] Game-forcing limit raise, about 10-11 HCP and 4-card support with undisclosed shortness. Three of the major asks for a singleton, or the next step with a void.
- 3M Weak 4-card raise, 0-5 HCP (occasionally 5 cards).
- 3M+1 [*over jump shift*] Undisclosed splinter and about 13-14 HCP (next step asks).
- 3NT Non-forcing 3-card raise (choice of contracts), usually 4-3-3-3 with stoppers.
- 4♣ *Inverted Trump Swiss*: about 13-14 HCP in a balanced hand with either four trumps headed by two of the top three honors, or five trumps headed by the ace or king.
- 4♦ Same as 4♣, but with a lesser trump holding.
- 4M 5-card preempt to game, denies a side ace or king. (Otherwise, Hardy bids 1NT, then game.)

Hardy's plan is based upon a decade or two of experience beyond the original Bergen Raises. Except in the case of the Jacoby 2NT response, opener is in charge.

Hardy does not like constructive raises. He has a point: the slow-down raise becomes a gamble. If it

transpires that the opponents intervene and that opener would like to compete in the major, withholding support will suppress that option. I like the odds with the slow-down raise, but expert opponents will be better at coping.

Consider a crucial effect of the constructive raise: opener can leap to game with a 5-loser hand, eschewing game tries. This is less fun, if responder can have a stinker. Constructive raises also reduce the need for counter-tries, should opener make a game try.

Hardy also does not think much of specific short suit bids. He has no mini-splinter or LIMIX bid, so responder's shortness can be evaluated effectively only in a game-forcing auction.

Hardy Raises are fundamentally incompatible with the recommended game try structure.

## **BOBALEW**

The BOBALEW jump raise structure was invented by Bob McCaw and Lew Gamerman and enjoys some popularity with experts in Eastern Massachusetts. The six bids starting just above the simple raise are employed as raises of the major suit opening bid. These bids include 2♠ (hearts trump), 2NT, 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ and 3NT (spades trump). These bids are employed in steps, that is, starting with either 2♠ or 2NT. Shortness means a singleton or void.

1. (2♠ or 2NT) Either 3-card support with shortness and 8-11 HCP, or 4+ card support with shortness and constructive values. [Yes, an *indirect mini-splinter* can be put to good use.]
2. (2NT or 3♣) Any of 3 balanced hands, over which opener asks with the next step:
  - 3 card support with 4-3-3-3 and 12-14 (rebid 3NT),
  - 4+ support with 12-14 no shortness (cheapest rebid), or
  - 4 card support, 15+ HCP, no shortness (next cheapest rebid).
3. (3♣ or 3♦) 4+ card support, limit raise, no shortness.
4. (3♦ or 3♥) 4+ support with unspecified shortness and 10-14 HCP or equivalent values. Basically any hand that wants to play in game with 4+ card support and shortness.
5. (3♥ or 3♠) Jump raise: mixed raise.<sup>12</sup>
6. (3S or 3NT) 4+ card support with an unspecified *singleton* and at least minimal slam interest.

Opener makes the cheapest bid to ask for a singleton (or which balanced hand), as long as the response is not overcalled. Note that, after step 4, the cheapest bid is 3 of our suit, which is forcing. Systems are on over doubles, but off over overcalls.

Opener may choose to not explore further. Having heard enough, opener places the contract – or attempts to do so. Opener always asks after step 2 or 6, as responder's hand can be unlimited.

The next three step responses (4♣, 4♦ and either 3NT or 4♥) show a step 6 hand with a *void*:

7. 4+ card support with a void in the bid suit [3NT=spades] and at least minimal slam interest.
8. 4+ card support with a void in the bid suit and at least minimal slam interest.
9. 4+ card support with a void in the bid suit and at least minimal slam interest.

After a void showing bid, any key card ask excludes the suit of the void. The responses are 0, 1, 2

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<sup>12</sup> The jump raise was undefined in the description I was given, so I dropped in the mixed raise. Weak also works.

without, and 2 with.

BOBALEW does not explicitly consider details of hand evaluation, winners, losers, and so forth. Nevertheless, it is highly compatible with the recommended game try structure. The chief problems with BOBALEW appear to be:

- Remembering the five main step responses and the three answers to an inquiry after step 2.
- Finger-bridge failures: for example, responder has a limit raise of hearts, selects step 3, and counts incorrectly, bidding either 2NT or 3♦, instead of 3♣. Don't underestimate this difficulty!<sup>13</sup>
- BOBALEW does not consider placement of honors for a game-splinter (step 4) or slam-splinter (step 6) – issues such as a singleton honor or a long suit with no honor. Consider permitting step 2 (balanced) instead, when appropriate.
- BOBALEW falls apart if any bid higher than the simple raise (other than the jump raise) is required for some other purpose.

## ***Eichenbaum 4-card Major Suit Raises***

Ken Eichenbaum provides a framework that fits well with our game tries and the ubiquitous Jacoby 2NT.

### **The LIMIX Raise**

Eichenbaum calls a hand with sure honor cover cards,<sup>14</sup> four trumps, and a singleton or void, a **LIMIX raise**. Such a hand is too strong for the simple raise or the mixed raise, because it could easily produce four winners (two honors and two ruffs). For example:

♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ xxxx  
♠ AQxx ♥ Jxxx ♦ x ♣ Txxx

Eichenbaum uses a 3♦ response to 1♥ or 1♠ as a LIMIX raise, with unspecified shortness. Opener usually places the contract. With slam interest, opener may ask for the shortness by bidding 3NT.

### **The Limit Plus Raise**

Make the LIMIX example hands stronger, and we have what Eichenbaum calls a **short limit raise**. This is a hand of overall limit raise strength that includes a singleton or void as part of its values, for example:

♠ Qxxx ♥ Axxx ♦ x ♣ Kxxx  
♠ AQxx ♥ Jxxx ♦ x ♣ KTxx

Eichenbaum uses the 3♣ response as a **limit plus raise**: 4-card support, 9-13 HCP, and 2 ½ to 4 ½ cover cards. It includes all balanced hands with invitational or minimum game force strength, as well as the short limit raise. Opener bids game, makes an artificial 3♦ bid, or attempts to sign off at three trumps.

The 3♦ inquiry necessarily forces to game over a good or great limit raise, or over a short limit raise with hearts trump. It is used when slamming or to stop when responder has a bad limit raise.

Accordingly, opener's signoff shows a truly minimum or subminimum hand. Responder may have game values, but should still proceed with caution.

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<sup>13</sup> A solid partner who likes Kickback messed up his keycard responses twice in the same session with me.

<sup>14</sup> Eichenbaum requires two "sure honor cover cards" for his LIMIX raise, but assumes the term is self-explanatory. That is the only mention of sure cover cards that I found in any of my sources.

## Eichenbaum Framework Summary

Some details in the chart below are mine; other details have been omitted. You should have enough here to decide whether Eichenbaum's methods are for you. If so, get his book and investigate further.

These methods work basically the same over both a 1♥ and 1♠ opening: Jacoby 2NT, 3♣ = limit plus, 3♦ = LIMIX, jump raise = mixed. His methods over Jacoby 2NT are definitely not standard, but they take into account that some hands covered the limit plus raise would normally be bid with Jacoby 2NT.

Eichenbaum uses the jump shift in the other major as a natural game invitation, not a raise. This is a solid treatment, but if we need those bids for something else, they are easily made available. For example, this framework fits well with the Tucker 2♠ response.

Eichenbaum Framework of 4-card Major Suit Raises				
R1	O2	R2	O3	
2♠	[over 1♥] Natural and invitational (or your choice).			
2NT	<i>Jacoby 2NT</i> : Game-forcing raise, usually 14+ points, with at least four trumps.			
	3♣	Some shortness; 5+ controls (A=2, K=1, trump Q=1), or 12 HCP in AKQ.		
		3♦	Asks for shortness	
			3♥	Short clubs.
			3♠	Short diamonds.
			3NT	Short major.
	3♦	5 trumps, no shortness, sound values, at most 7 losers.		
	3♥	6 trumps, no shortness, sound values, at most 7 losers.		
	3♠	Some shortness, minimum/light opening, more than 7 losers. 3NT asks.		
	3NT	5 trumps, no shortness, strongest possible hand.		
	4♥/4♠	Worst possible opening bid, more than 7 losers.		
3♣	<i>Limit plus raise</i> : at least four trumps and 9-13 HCP.			
	3♦	Artificial inquiry, either a game or slam try.		
		3♥/3♠	[trump] <b>Bad limit raise</b> , about 10-11 HCP and a doubleton.	
		3♥/3♠	[other major] <b>Short limit raise</b> . 3NT asks.	
		3NT	(Serious) <b>Great limit raise</b> , 3 honor covers, 10-12 HCP, 4-6 controls.	
		4♥/4♠	[trump] <b>Good limit raise</b> , about 12-13 HCP, but not slam-worthy.	
		Other	<b>Good limit raise</b> , about 12-13 HCP, concentration of values in bid suit.	
	3♥/3♠	[trump] Minimum values, suggests playing here.		
	4♥/4♠	Maximum values, but not slam-worthy.		
	CueBid	The cheapest first or second round control, with a slam-worthy hand.		
3♦	<i>LIMIX raise</i> : two sure honor winners, four trumps, and shortness somewhere. 3NT asks.			
3♥	[over 1♠] Natural and invitational (or your choice).			
3♥/3♠	<i>Mixed raise</i> : 4 trumps; two sure honor cover cards and a doubleton, or 10 SP.			
Splinter	The double-jump shift is game-forcing, about 11-15 HCP, singleton or void in bid suit.			

The Eichenbaum methods do not include the 3NT response, which can therefore be used as a game-preempt with a side card. His invitational jump into the other major can be reassigned.

Having to guess about responder's shortness (for game purposes) is a disadvantage of these methods.

### Suit/Lead over a Double

Play transfers over an opponent's double of our major suit opening, starting at 1NT. Eichenbaum calls this **Suit/Lead**: responder either offers to play in the transfer suit, or is indicating a lead, on the way to

raising. A transfer into the major is a constructive raise, while the single raise is a weak 4-card raise. The main cost of this scheme: we cannot make a natural bid of 1NT.

Eichenbaum's bids at 2NT and higher are changed over the double: 2NT is a 3-card limit raise, *or better*; 3♣ is a 4-card limit raise, *or better*; and 3♦ remains a LIMIX raise. See his book for more ideas.

## Complex Mini-Splinter Frameworks

The stuff in this section works, but may be too complicated for most pairs to actually play. Accordingly, the charts for these methods have been removed from this version of the article.

**Four bids.** If the jump into the other major is always available, then there are four bids available between the simple and jump raises: 2NT, 3♣, 3♦, and either 2♠ or 3♥. This plan could be used:

*2NT is a limit raise or better.* The two cheaper jump shifts (2♠ & 3♣ over 1♥, or 3♣ & 3♦ over 1♠) are full-range mini-splinters in the bid suit. Over 1♥, 2♠ could also be a maximum mini-splinter in *diamonds*. The jump shift just below trump (3♦ or 3♥), is a minimum mini-splinter (or rare slam-splinter) in the bid suit.

**Only three bids.** If the jump into the other major is *not* available over either major suit opening, then there are only three bids available between the simple and jump raises: 2NT, 3♣ and 3♦. In this situation, it is not possible to name all short suits without committing to game, unless we use 2NT *and* a second bid to handle short suits. Use this plan:<sup>15</sup>

*3♣ is a limit raise or better.* This works about the same as 2NT, except that we cannot promptly distinguish opener's void from a singleton. 3♦ is a minimum mini-splinter (or rare slam-splinter) in diamonds. 2NT is a minimum mini-splinter (or rare slam-splinter) in either clubs or the other major. All maximum mini-splinters are bid as balanced limit raises. See the second chart below.

## Game Try Methods

**The old college game try.** Bid game, and try to make it!

*Comment:* This joke has real advantages: 1♥ – 2♥; 4♥ does not give anything away. If we think game is probable, we will get more help from the opponents, if we just bid it. In some quarters, this is known as the modern expert game try.

## Telling Game Tries

Telling game tries tell something about declarer's hand; they also indicate features in dummy's hand that would be either more or less valuable to declarer. It is these features upon which dummy should focus. These building blocks can also be used by dummy when responding to an asking game try.

**Balanced game try.** High card points are best for bidding balanced hands; declarer should have about 17 of them to bid 2NT. Accept 3NT with an above-average balanced hand and scattered values, or pass with a minimum. With a hand unsuitable for playing notrump, dummy goes back to the major at the three or four level.

*Counter try:* The literature does not document a counter try. It makes sense that dummy's new suit show a high card (or length) feature, with doubt as to strain.

*Comment:* This old game try remains standard, when people don't want a more complicated method. It definitely has merit. I recommend that the partnership agree to treat 2NT as forcing, so it can be used with a semi-balanced hand.

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<sup>15</sup> If the jump to 3♥ is available over 1♠, you may choose the complexity of playing the four bids system over 1♠.

## Re-Raise Methods

**General game try.** The old standard re-raise (for example, 1♥ – 2♥; 3♥) is made with good trumps, and asks dummy to bid game with a maximum of points. This usage is completely obsolete.

**1-2-3 Stop.** This re-raise is preemptive, not a game try; it is made with a six card suit headed by the AKQ in a near minimum hand. For example, re-raise to 3♥ holding ♠ 73 ♥ AKQ874 ♦ 854 ♣ K3. Decent opponents will seldom let us play 2♥, so make them decide what to do at the three level.

*Comment:* 1-2-3 stop is coming back into favor, either as an otherwise idle bid or when combined with a help-suit game try in trumps.

**Trump help game try.** Most people who play help-suit game tries also play them in trumps. The re-raise shows a hand that requires significant help in trumps. Many examples show a suit headed by the jack, but a lone top honor is possible. With the agreement that dummy must not accept without at least one top trump honor, this approach can be combined with 1-2-3 Stop: if our trumps are headed by the AKQ, dummy can do nothing but pass.

**Trumps and aces or Trumps and primes game try.** A re-raise can be used to ask for trumps and aces or trumps and primes. Don't use the latter method, if declarer might have a singleton somewhere, since a random king may be wasted.

*Comment:* These methods should not be combined with 1-2-3 Stop, as dummy might accept with a pair of aces and either JTx or xxxx in trumps.

## Side suit methods

**Long-suit game try (trial bid),** also called the **help-suit game try.** The suit might be as few as three cards. It should contain one top honor, plus possibly one minor honor, when possible. Some obvious failings of the trial bid are covered in the main text, but here are some more.

- On 65 test hands where declarer would like to make a trial bid, 31 times declarer did not hold a three or four card suit with one top honor (with or without one minor honor). The possible trial bids consume the space needed to handle most unbalanced hands, as well as hands with defects for no trump. Almost half the time, it is inappropriate to the task. Because of the focus on the one suit, changing the description of declarer's holding won't help.
- Trial bids are not accurate within the prescribed help-suit itself. Consider these holdings:

Declarer opposite 3 small		Dummy opposite 3 small		Combined	
Holding	Tricks	Holding	Tricks	Tricks	Bonus
Kxx	0.50	Qxx	0.25	1.00	0.25
KJx	1.00	Qxx	0.25	2.00	0.75
Kxx	0.50	QTx	0.38	1.50	1.12
KJx	1.00	QTx	0.38	2.00	0.62

The bonus is the number of expected tricks added by the combined holdings, over the sum of what the two unsupported holdings are expected to produce. What is dummy to do? His Qxx could turn the expected number of total tricks into 1.0 (a paltry 0.25 bonus) or 2.0 total tricks (0.75 bonus tricks). How does he know if the unsupported queen is enough? It's not so bad with QTx, which would be worth 1.5 or 2.0 expected tricks (1.12 or 0.62 bonus tricks). Dummy cannot know whether he needs the ten or jack in support of the queen, that is, whether declarer has one of those cards. There are problems with lots more holdings.

- Dummy may be in a quandary when holding a singleton in the help-suit. Partner's honor there is likely wasted, unless it is the ace. We would prefer the bonus effects of combining honors, when we have a fit in the suit.
- The game try provides more information to the defense than the value returned to the

partnership.

*Comment:* Consider leading the help suit, if the opponents use a help suit game try and sign off immediately.

**Hardy help-suit game try.** Hardy's help-suit game try is significantly different from what is described above. This game try promises "some honor holding" in the bid suit, and *denies interest in values in the suits that could have been shown more cheaply*. That is, declarer and dummy bid features *up the line*, until either decides to bid game or sign off.

*Counter try:* With modest help in the game try suit, dummy bids the cheaper suit containing a feature. *Comment:* How should declarer handle Ax, Kx, Qx, Jx, or xx? If we skip over it, partner will discount values in the suit; if we bid it, dummy may overrate quacks in the suit. In the test bidding that follows, doubletons were always be skipped, a slight improvement. Regular trial bids fared better than these.

**Short-suit game try.** With this method, a new suit shows a singleton or void. An example from KS: suppose declarer holds ♠ AKxxx ♥ Axx ♦ x ♣ KJxx [a 6-loser hand]. If dummy holds ♠ Jxxx ♥ Kxx ♦ xxx ♣ Qxx, the auction proceeds 1♠ – 2♣; 3♦ – 4♠, since dummy has no wasted diamond values.

*Features for dummy to count:* all honors in all but the short suit, and the ace in the short suit (but an honor in some other suit would combine better with declarer's honors). A fourth trump, even in a flat hand, helps prevent an effective forcing defense.

*Features for dummy to discount:* secondary honors in the short suit.

*Counter try:* When dummy wants declarer to decide, he bids a suit below three of the trump suit.<sup>16</sup> If there is only one such suit, it is an artificial counter try, passing the decision back to declarer. If two suits are available, the message is about the same, but also shows a feature in the suit bid (relative to the other choice).

**Weak-suit game try.** The bid of a new suit shows three or four cards without any top honor.

*Comment:* The opening lead in declarer's weak suit is appeals: lead across strength into weakness. However, if dummy jumps to game, we should probably lead a trump, as dummy may be short in the weak-suit. The weak-suit game try seems like a poor choice.

**Strong-suit game try.** This bid promises a chunky holding in a long suit: usually two of the top three honors and five or more cards. Marshall Miles says, after 1♠ – 2♣, declarer might bid 3♥ on ♠ AQxxx ♥ AQTxx ♦ Jx ♣ x or ♠ Axxxxx ♥ QJ9xx ♦ – ♣ Kx. In either case, declarer should make game opposite the major suit kings.

**Void-Showing Slam Try.** Eddie Kantar recommends a rare but useful addition to any system of game tries: if declarer jumps into a new suit, that is a *slam try* showing a *void* in the bid suit. If declarer asks for key cards, the holding in the void suit should be ignored. [We use this bid as a different slam try.]

## Asking Game Tries

### 2NT Asks

**Artificial 2NT game invitation.** To accept game, dummy bids 3NT with scattered values and only three trumps, four of the major, or four of a useful five card side suit with a maximum (in case declarer is slamming). With a poor hand and poor trump support, declarer signs off at three of the major. 3♣ shows a bad hand with Kxxx or better in trumps. 3♦ (and 3♥) are counter-tries. This Aces method did not catch on.

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<sup>16</sup> In the original KS method, a counter try was also a short suit. That won't happen enough to be as useful as the described method.

**2NT Asks for a Doubleton.** When spades are trump, Marty Bergen recommended using 2NT to ask dummy to bid a doubleton. With a flat hand, dummy bids three of the trump suit with a minimum, or 3NT with a max. Dummy can jump to the four level, to show a good side suit in a maximum hand.  
*Comment:* Bergen combined this feature with direct short suit game tries, Bergen raises, and constructive simple raises. A little thought shows this is a well-integrated system, but it did not catch on. Bergen neglected to recommend using 2♠ to ask, when hearts are trump, which would allow dummy to show a doubleton spade at 2NT.

### Next Step Asks

Declarer bids the next step: 2NT over 2♠, or 2♠ over 2♥. Dummy may decide the issue immediately, a primary consideration when playing nondescript [Pavlicek] game tries. In other methods, dummy usually answers declarer's question; dummy decides the issue only with the same answer for all suits. The partnership agrees on the question being asked, perhaps:

- What is the nearest suit in which you would accept a help-suit game try? [Kokish]
- What is the nearest suit in which you would reject a short suit game try? [Miles]
- What is the nearest suit containing a concentration of strength? [Pavlicek]

The *nearest* suit is the one that can be shown most cheaply. The questions above have similar answers, but Pavlicek's question is substantially different: it is not answered when dummy's hand contains scattered values. Asking for a weak suit (or accepting a short-suit game try) would expose us to lead-directing doubles.

If declarer makes an asking game try, dummy will have no opportunity to make a counter try. However, declarer will be able to use any intervening bid to ask a second time, about the new suit, or for minimum vs. maximum.

**Nondescript game try.** This is part of the main system, from the methods of Richard Pavlicek. His original methods include these additional features:

- Most other bids are slam tries. (With our shrinking simple raise, slam tries should be rare.)
- 2NT over 2♥ is a natural game try. My investigation shows this can be a valuable method, especially when played as forcing.
- When responder shows a concentration in the suit below trumps, and opener signs off, responder proceeds to game with a maximum hand. This is a *disaster waiting to happen* (it did, in my test bidding). We could agree to only show a concentration in the suit below trumps with a maximum, but we can do better. I recommend that responder shoot out 3NT with a maximum including a double stopper in the suit below trump, and otherwise respect partner's decision.

### Test Deals

Before I got into shrinking the simple raise, my experience did not tell which of several game try frameworks is truly best. I bid some test deals with all of them. Here is the summary of the results.

Final contracts were scored on a 0 to 4 basis: 0=Horrible, 1=Undesirable, 2=OK (about 50-50), 3=Desirable, 4=Great. If one partner had to guess at the final contract, a score in the middle was used.

	All Deals	Total
<b>Standard Long/Help/Trial GT:</b> A "trial bid suit," if available: 3+ cards, one top honor, plus at most one minor honor. Re-raise asks for help in trumps. 2NT is a balanced game try.	Help-suit GT	50
	No suit is expected trial suit	18
	2NT balanced GT	13
	Re-raise trump help GT	3
	<b>Contract score</b>	<b>219</b>
	<b>Declarer hand concealed</b>	<b>15</b>
	<b>Declarer (5-3) exposed to force</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Hardy help-suit GT:</b> Up the line, 3+ cards and some honor holding. Re-raise asks for help in trumps. 2NT is a balanced game try.	Help-suit GT	49
	Doubleton skipped	3
	2NT balanced GT	12
	Re-raise trump help GT	4
	<b>Contract score</b>	<b>212</b>
	<b>Declarer hand concealed</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>Declarer (5-3) exposed to force</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Modified Kokish GT:</b> Direct short-suit game tries combined with nondescript game tries that promise a semi-balanced hand. Re-raise asks for trumps and primes.	Short-suit GT	46
	Step nondescript GT	16
	Re-raise trumps & primes GT	3
	<b>Contract score</b>	<b>236</b>
	<b>Declarer hand concealed</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>Declarer (5-3) exposed to force</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Miles GT:</b> Direct strong-suit game tries combined with asking for short suit rejection.	Strong suit GT	10
	Short-suit rejection inquiry	55
	Re-raise trump help or AKQ	1
	<b>Contract score</b>	<b>220</b>
	<b>Declarer hand concealed</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>Declarer (5-3) exposed to force</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Pavlicek GT:</b> Pavlicek game tries: only nondescript game tries (and 2NT balanced with hearts trump).	Step nondescript GT	52
	2NT balanced GT	7
	Natural slam try	5
	<b>Contract score</b>	<b>222</b>
	<b>Declarer hand concealed</b>	<b>48</b>
	<b>Declarer (5-3) exposed to force</b>	<b>2</b>

A separate tally was made, when one of these events occurred on a game try hand:

- Useful concealment of declarer's hand occurred. This is a plus.
- The defense was tipped to a useful forcing defense, in a 5-3 fit. This is a minus.

Surprisingly, the Hardy help-suit game tries failed to surpass standard game tries. Each method missed some cold games, due to the rule that, with no help at all in the help suit, dummy must sign off.

Pavlicek game tries outsourced both help-suit methods for contract score, but was not significantly better than standard methods. However, the Pavlicek methods gained points by concealing declarer's hand on more than three times as many deals.

The Miles results are about the same as those for standard methods, except for the Miles methods tipping the defense about a dangerous forcing defense on six hands, instead of one. The Miles methods sound good, but appear to be ineffective.

The Modified Kokish methods bid to substantially better contracts than the other methods, and in many cases, more easily. However, they exposed declarer to dangerous forces a dozen times, and generally concealed declarer's hand about a third of the times that the Pavlicek methods did.

It's not clear what the relative values of the three ratings are. Defense is the hardest part of the game; concealing declarer's hand is clearly a good thing, but how good? It's clearly more important against defenders who listen.

Vulnerability was ignored. These hands were scored and included in the score totals, but not included as tallied bids by type: either a jump into a void (slam try) or a jump to game. During the process, these ideas came to light:

- The direct short-suit game try produces superior results because it addresses the whole hand with one bid, and because there is usually a counter try available to dummy. Declarer usually has a five or six loser hand, and dummy's counter try shows two useful features.
- When no counter try is available, the partnership can be reduced to guessing.
- The Miles methods suffer from the lack of counter tries, and the confusion as to whether or not declarer actually has shortness (a touted advantage). When playing the short suit rejection, dummy should not reject in a "necessary doubleton." Just assume declarer is not short in that suit, and skip over it.
- It appears that the ability to make a balanced game try is a good thing. Pavlicek plays 2NT natural when hearts are trump, and it seems to help. It might be worth also playing that, when spades are trump, 3♣ is a balanced game try. When such a game try is available, it appears sensible to play it as *forcing*, and to include 5-4-2-2, 6-3-2-2 and even 7-2-2-2 shapes. High card points are more accurate on balanced hands, so this is a good tool.
- When the short-suit game try is used for all game tries with a singleton, then dummy gains traction when the modified Kokish declarer makes a (balanced) nondescript game try. However, it is clear that declarer should be leery of making a short-suit game try with only five trumps. If an opponent has four trumps, he gets control of the hand at declarer's second ruff, and the first might be at trick one or two.
- When dummy shows a concentration in a suit, especially the cheapest suit, and declarer signs off, it is likely declarer has shortness there.
- It appears that when using a re-raise to ask for trumps, a help-suit approach (trumps and aces) is superior to trumps and primes. More than once, declarer used this bid with five bad trumps and a strong side suit; kings in side suits have reduced value in this context.

### Test Hand Methodology

Using Dealmaster Pro, I generated 99 deals that would be candidates for game tries in spades, and another 99 for hearts. In each file, I set the West hand to be dealer, with 13-18 HCP, five or more of the major, and no longer side suit (and fewer spades than hearts in the heart file). The East hand had 5-10 HCP and at least three cards in the major. (DM Pro lists the deal number as \*\* instead of 100 or more, and I did not want to bother fixing that in files.) I exported each file in portable bridge notation (PBN).

Using text editors, I added some boilerplate to each deal, including the 1M -2M start of the auction, to make the analysis easier to record. Bridge Composer was used to open each file, hide the North and South hands, and enter my bidding. I caused it to display multiple deals per page.

A deal was deleted from each file if any of the following occurred, assuming a standard raise:

- The West hand was too weak for a game try, or would always leap to game.
- The West hand would not open in the major suit.
- The East hand should always use a slow-down 1NT response, instead of a simple raise.
- The East hand would itself invite or drive to game.
- The East hand would respond 1♠ over 1♥, which happened about four times.

This left me with 39 spade deals and 35 heart deals. This is not enough to prove any close points, but it gives some solid ideas.

The DM Pro program is not as robust as Thomas Andrews' Deal program, equipped with BigDeal.

## Annotated References

**Ely Culbertson**, *The New Gold Book (Contract Bridge Complete)*, ©1936-1949: Culbertson recommended counting honor winners, plus long suit winners, roughly: one for each card over three in the trump suit, and half a winner for each card over three in a side suit (with many intricacies). JTx, Qxx or any four cards, were minimum trumps for a raise. Declarer was advised to bid again with 5 ½ to 6 ½ winners: re-raise, a new suit, or 2NT. Declarer should rebid 3H on ♠ 6 ♥ AQJ75 ♦ KJ4 ♣ QT65 = 6 ½ winners; rebid 3D on ♠ 65 ♥ AQ76 ♦ AK43 ♣ QJ6 = 5 ½ winners; rebid 4H on ♠ A5 ♥ AQJ865 ♦ KJT ♣ 32 = 7 ½ winners; no example for 2NT. These bids are not called “game tries.” Responding to these bids goes into little more detail than to either sign off or bid game. Many features of the Culbertson system were different from modern methods.

**Charles Goren** was Mr. Bridge to generations of bridge players. He won many bridge honors, often with professional partners and teammates. He popularized Milton Work’s 4-3-2-1 point count, which supplanted Culbertson’s more complicated *honor tricks*. Goren wrote many books, such as *Point Count Bidding*, 1949. Goren and Culbertson aggressively promoted opening four card major suits, with a suitable rebid.

**Alfred Sheinwold**, *5 Weeks to Winning Bridge*, ©1959-1964 was for many years the best text on methods in the Goren style. After 1 ♥ – 2 ♥, Sheinwold recommends: pass with ♠ 873 ♥ AKJ94 ♦ A85 ♣ 94; rebid 3 ♥ (2NT second choice) on ♠ K73 ♥ AKJ94 ♦ A85 ♣ 94; rebid 3♦ on ♠ A3 ♥ AKJ94 ♦ QJ85 ♣ 94 [dummy should “lend special weight to high cards in your new suit (diamonds) to help him decide a close point”]; jump to 4♥ (or with a good partner, bid 3♦, trying for slam) on ♠ A3 ♥ AKJ94 ♦ KQJ85 ♣ 4; no example for 2NT. We would think that 2NT would be used when declarer has only a four card major – but no – the opening bid then would usually be 1NT (16-18) on balanced hands.

**Robert B. Ewen** invented the *indirect game try* around 1970, as a part of two-way game tries. These combined direct short-suit tries with indirect long-suit tries. Declarer bids the next step (2NT over 2♠), dummy bids the next step after that (3♣), and declarer makes a descriptive bid. For example, Ewen recommended two-way game tries, the combination of direct short suit game tries with indirect long suit game tries. Indirect game tries are functionally the same as direct tries, except that room for a counter-try is seldom available, and the opponents are offered an opportunity for a lead-directing double of a suit (3♣ here). Indirect game tries have largely been superseded by asking game tries.

**William S. Root**, *Commonsense Bidding*, ©1986, is the best authority on standard bidding with five card major openings. A two over one may be only a game try, but it promises another bid. Root’s game tries are similar to those of Culbertson, Goren and Sheinwold.

**Edgar Kaplan & Alfred Sheinwold**, *How to Play Winning Bridge*, ©1962, 1958. Kaplan and Sheinwold won the most masterpoints in North America for 1957. They published their revolutionary system in 1958, including 1NT 12-14 (or AK-A), five card majors, and many other features, including short suit game tries.

**Bobby Goldman**, *Aces Scientific*, ©1978. This system was one of the bidding cornerstones of the multiple world champion Aces bridge team. The system includes 1-2-3 Stop, help suit game tries, and an artificial 2NT game invitation (the first *asking* game try that I found).

**Marty Bergen**, *Better Bidding with Bergen (Volume 1 – Uncontested Auctions)*, ©1985. By the time Bergen was writing, “need help” game tries were in widespread use. He said there were many hands where he needed help, deciding where to ask for help! He gives these six hands, after 1♠ – 2♠:

1. ♠ AKJ54 ♥ 86 ♦ 97 ♣ AQJ7
2. ♠ AKJ972 ♥ QJ4 ♦ QJ3 ♣
3. ♠ KQJT6 ♥ AQ7 ♦ K965 ♣ 8

4. ♠ KQT87 ♥ 86 ♦ AKT5 ♣ K6
5. ♠ AKJ74 ♥ AKQ ♦ 942 ♣ 63
6. ♠ AKJ742 ♥ AJ ♦ J53 ♣ 92

He says declarer would like to make a short suit game try on (2) and (3), a long-suit game try on (1) and (4), and a general game try on (5) and (6). Because the re-raise is generally used to ask for help in trumps, there would be no general game try. He suggests there are many players who would bid 3♦ on all six hands. Instead, Bergen advocates methods where declarer asks, and dummy tells. In addition to being more efficient, it conceals declarer's hand from the defense. This volume describes Bergen Raises; the first known use of the term "mixed raise" is supposed to be in *Volume 2*.

**Marty Bergen**, *Better Bidding with Bergen (Volume 2 – Competitive Bidding, Fit Bids, & More)*, ©1986. B.R.O.M.A.D., p. 64.

**Max Hardy**, *Standard Bridge Bidding for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ©2000. Max Hardy was a bridge player, writer (especially about 2/1), and tournament director who won over 200 unrestricted regional events.

**Max Hardy**, *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ©2002. Help-suit game tries. Weak-suit game tries, as an alternative. Two-way game tries. Kokish game tries, with a modification.

**Marshall Miles**, *Modern Constructive Bidding*, ©2005.

Miles recommends a help-suit game try in trumps, overlaid with 1-2-3 Stop. New suits are natural, showing true two-suiters. The 2♠/2NT step asks for the cheapest suit in which a short suit game try would be rejected, similar to showing a concentration of strength. (Sign off with no game interest.)

**Brent Manley, et. al.**, Editors, *Encyclopedia of Bridge, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Check here first, for most issues.

**Phillip Alder**, "The Losing Trick Count", <http://www.phillipalderbridge.com/LTC.HTM>.

**Richard Pavlicek**, "Relay Major Suit Game Try", <http://www.rpbridge.net/7g70.htm>.

**Eric Schwartz, et. al.**, "Non-Descriptive Game Tries", <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/non-descriptive-game-tries-2/>. Eric is a strong proponent of nondescript game tries.

**Jeff Rubens**, *The Secrets of Winning Bridge*, © 1969.

**Ron Klinger**, *The Modern Losing Trick Count*, © 1986. For many years, the best book available on LTC.

**Keith Meinelt, et. al.**, "Losing Trick Count," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Losing-Trick\\_Count#New\\_Losing-Trick\\_Count\\_.28NLTC.29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Losing-Trick_Count#New_Losing-Trick_Count_.28NLTC.29). Pointed to by <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/new-losing-trick-count-nltc/>, Sep 7, 2015. Reportedly contains much of the information in Johannes Koelman's article, "A New Losing Trick Count", *The Bridge World*, May, 2003.

**Kevin Wilson**, *Upgrading and Improving Losing Trick Count*, <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/upgrading-and-improving-losing-trick-count/>, Feb 16, 2014. This fine article propounds Johannes Koelman's NLTC, renaming it modified losing trick count (MLTC). [Both names are deficient, so this new name has not helped anybody.]

**Lawrence Diamond**, *Mastering Hand Evaluation*, © 2015. Diamond performed solid research, comparing Klinger's Modern LTC to Johannes Koelman's New LTC and the Belladonna-Garozzo LTC, on many actual championship deals. "The easiest to use accurate method proved to be NLTC with additional adjustments for certain honor combinations, distribution (when raising partner with 4+ trumps), adding for uncounted assets (singleton kings, doubleton queens, jacks/tens with higher honors, and appropriate deductions for strength opposite shortness." Because "modified new losing trick count" is an undesirable name for the method, I would call this the Diamond Losing Trick Count (DLTC).

**George Rosenkranz and Phillip Alder**, *Bid to Win, Play for Pleasure*, © 1990. Concealed within these 428

pages on the Romex bidding system, pages 30-32 advance the modern theory of cover cards.

**Eric Rodwell**, *Bidding Topics, Book 1*, © 2017. See especially, “3 Mixed Raises.”

**Ken Eichenbaum**, *Winners, Losers and Cover Cards*, © 2010. Of all my sources, this book strikes closest to what I believe to be best, especially for non-competitive auctions. Once we get beyond the arcane typography (inconsistently applied caps, bold, italics, underscoring, indentations, etc.) and typos, the content is excellent.

**Andrew Robson and Oliver Segal**, *Partnership Bidding at Bridge: the Contested Auction*, © 1993. This is a modern classic. For years, largely because of this book, I have played fit-showing jumps “always.” I still believe they are best in competition, by a passed hand, and over a minor suit opening.

**Larry Cohen**, *To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks*, © 1992. A primary application of the LAW: it is usually safe to compete to the three level, if our side holds nine trumps.

**Steve Weinstein & Dan Wolkowitz**. “Mixed Raises” (Parts 1 & 2), 2012.

<http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/mixed-raises-part-1-how-to-bid-and-defend-against-them/>

<http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/mixed-raises-part-2/>

**Benoit Lessard, et. al.**, “How to get 5 mini splinters and 3 raises for the price of 4 bids”, Nov. 8, 2013. After a 1♠ opening: 3♠ = preemptive raise; 3♥ = mini-splinter, short hearts (9-10); 3♦ = mini-splinter, short diamonds (7-8) or (9-10); 3♣ = mini-splinter, short clubs (7-8) or (9-10), mixed raise, or limit raise. He sorts out 3♣ by assuming that any inquiry will go to game opposite a limit raise. I swiped his basic idea, but omitted the mixed raise from 3♣; then I omitted that framework altogether, in favor of merging the limit raise into the forcing raise. For Lessard’s plan to work over 1♥, we need to play Jacoby 2♠, 2NT as the 4-way bid (short spades), and 3♦ one-way. (It’s better to play the one-way bid in the weak range.)

<http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/how-to-get-5-mini-splinters-and-3-raises-for-the-price-of-4-bids/>

**David Loeb**, “Jacoby 2NT,” March 8, 2015. <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/jacoby-2nt/>. A fine overview of issues and references on Jacoby 2NT, including...

**Andrew Gumperz**, “Limited Bidding: Reengineering Jacoby 2NT,” May 9, 2012.

<http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/limited-bidding-reengineering-jacoby-2nt/>.

**Andrew Gumperz**, “Slam Bidding: Limiting your hand with a splinter,” May 2, 2012.

<http://bridgewinners.com/article/print/slam-bidding-limiting-your-hand-with-a-splinter/>

**Gavin Wolpert, et. al.**, “Spiral Raises”, July 13, 2010. Be sure to read the comments by experts containing alternative methods and comparisons, including Cooper and Bethe.

<https://bridgewinners.com/article/view/spiral-raises/>

**Pete Matthews, Jr, et. al.**, “Mini-Splinters and Alternatives,” September 5, 2017.

<http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/mini-splinters-and-alternatives/>

**Pete Matthews, Jr**, “Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions at Bridge,” © 2011. Tucker, and more.

<http://web.mit.edu/mitdlbc/www/contrib.html#Articles>

**Pete Matthews, Jr**, “Bridge Bidding Systems for Finding Major Suit Fits,” © 2010. 2-way NMF, XYZ, and more. <http://web.mit.edu/mitdlbc/www/contrib.html#Articles>

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