

What is your Game Try Agreement?

By Neil H. Timm

Playing many bridge systems (e.g., 2/1/ACOL, Precision), the bidding sequence for a major suit opening bid 1M-2M shows a major suit fit. What is next? Many opening bidders now describe their hand with a natural long-suit game try (LSGT) showing a second 4-card suit (**no alert needed since it is a natural bid**) or a help-suit game try (HSGT) showing weakness with 2 small in the suit (**alert required**), which helps the opponents!

Is there a better approach?

Yes, what is needed is a bid that asks about responders' hand with a relay bid or shows a characteristic of opener's hand that provides information for partner (game/slam try) that does not help the opponents with their defense.

The bidding system is called the Short Suit Game Try (SSGT).

The asking sequence involves bidding the next step with the cheapest bids: 2♠/2NT over 1♥-2♥-2♠*/1♠-2♠-2NT, respectively, which must be altered!

1♥-2♥-2♠*-	?	Responses
	3♣*	shortness in clubs
	3♦*	shows shortness in diamonds
	2NT*	shows shortness in spades
	3♥*	Minimum (8/9 dummy points)
	3NT*	Maximum (10 Dummy points)
	3♠*	Maximum with four spades
	4m*	5+ to KQ in minor bid with Maximum
	4♥	to Play
	4♠	1430 for hearts (kickback)
2NT		balanced
3♣*/3♦*/3♠*		S/V shortness (telling bid)
3♥		Need help (a control) Pass with none and bid game with A/K
3NT		Choice of game
4♣*/4♦*		Splinter (S/V) slam interest
4♥		To Play
4♠		1430 kickback for hearts
5X		Exclusion Keycard with a void in the bid suit
5NT		Bid a grand slam with 2 of top 3 honors and 6 with the ♥A

1♠-2♠-2NT*-

? Responses

3♣*	shows shortness in clubs
3♦*	shows shortness in diamonds
3♥*	shows shortness in hearts
3♠*	Minimum (8/9 dummy points)
3NT*	Maximum (10 Dummy points)
4m*	5+ to KQ in minor bid with Maximum
4♠	To Play
4NT	1430 for spades
2NT	balanced
3♣*/3♦*/3♥*	S/V shortness (telling bid)
3♠	Need help (a control) Pass with none and bid game with A/K
3NT	Choice of game
4♣*/4♦*	Splinter (S/V)
4♠	To Play
4NT	1430 for spades
5X	Exclusion Keycard with a void in the bid suit
5NT	Bid a grand slam with 2 of top 3 honors and 6 with the ♠A

What if the opponents interfere?

Game tries are made by cue bidding and doubles are ignored!

Why is knowing shortness so important?

Because one may use the SST Rule to evaluate trick potential for game and slam. The rule works as follows: If the number of points between the two hands is 19-21 points, the number of potential tricks is equal to 13-SST (in both hands). Since an opening hand has about 12HCP and responder on average has 7HCP the total is about 19 and 13-3=shortness in both hands = 10 tricks and game. And 13- (0/1 in both hands) yields slam.

On average an opening hand has 12-13HCP and a responder has 6-7HCP; or 12.5+6.5=19! If opener has 12 and partner has 9, the total is 21. Hence, the SST rule is not unreasonable in a bridge auction. Now what is key is knowing if the shortage in both hands becomes critical!

Simple examples

(1) ♠A1032 ♥AQ987 ♦A♣AK8

The bidding goes 1♥ - 2♥ - ? You don't need help, but you must ask for shortness! If partner bid hears you are on your way to slam. Showing shortness is not important and help suit does not apply.

(2) ♠AK1032 ♥KJ2 ♦AJ7 ♣2

The bidding goes 1♠ - 2♠ - ? You in this case want to show shortness in clubs and bid 3♣. If partner bids 3♠ you will pass. And if he has a working ace will bid game.

(3) ♠109876 ♥AK7 ♦AKJ2 ♣3 AK8

The bidding goes 1♠ - 2♠ - ? While you have shortness, you bid 2NT to ask partner for shortness and after hearing 3♠, you pass since partner has no shortness. If you had bid 3♦ to show shortness, partner would bid 3♠ without shortness in diamonds.

In example 3 we had a choice between tell and asking, in general it is better to ask than tell since telling may allow the opponent behind you to sacrifice in your short suit!

Playing 2/1, a popular enhancement to the SSGT convention is the **Rodwell Game Try (3344 Spiral Convention)** - After responder bids a possible 4 card major and opener makes a 2-level suit raise, responder makes an **artificial next suit rank query** to determine opener's trump length and strength.

Bidding	Meaning
1m - 1♥; 1m - 1♠; 2♥ - 2♠*; 2♠ - 2NT*;	Bidding 2♠*/2NT*, the next rank above agreed on major asks opener to make a step response describing trump suit length and overall hand strength
1♣ - 1♥; 1♣ - 1♠; 2♥ - 2♠*; 2♠ - 2NT*; 2NT* - ; 3♣* - ;	1st step = 3 trump, minimum hand (11-13 points)
1♣ - 1♥; 1♣ - 1♠; 2♥ - 2♠*; 2♠ - 2NT*; 3♣* - ; 3♦* - ;	2nd step = 3 trump, maximum hand (14-15 points)
1♣ - 1♥; 1♣ - 1♠; 2♥ - 2♠*; 2♠ - 2NT*; 3♦* - ; 3♥* - ;	3rd step = 4 trump, minimum hand (11-13 points)
1♣ - 1♥; 1♣ - 1♣; 2♥ - 2♠*; 2♠ - 2NT*; 3♥* - ; 3♠* - ;	4th step = 4 trump, maximum hand (14-15 points)

The alert chart says "Game tries that, by agreement, may have fewer than three cards in the suit bid" must be alerted. This means that if your game tries are made with a suit of fewer than three cards, alert. If your agreement is that you always have at least three cards, no alert is needed (e.g., HSGT with at least 3-cards or LSGT).