

## Two Over One

# Game Tries

### The Intelligent Way to Invite Your Intelligent Partner

Xena and Xylon were performing so fabulously in their bridge lessons that they decided they would finally take the plunge and enter, for their very first time, the next afternoon's open duplicate match at the downtown bridge club. Why, just that evening they had gotten the right answer nearly every time their bridge instructor had given them a problem. The class had been about invitational values and knowing when to bid game and when to stop short. Opener invites with 16 to 18, and responder with 9, or a good 8, accepts the invitation and bids game. Likewise, responder must have 10 to 12 to invite opener to bid game, in which case opener will accept with 14 or 15, perhaps even with a very juicy 13. Everything was making such good sense now. They knew they would make a good showing of themselves the next day.

That afternoon Xena sat East and Xylon plucked West's first hand from the board. Oops, the cards nearly got away from him somehow, but not quite, and no one even noticed, except for Xena, who politely feigned not to have. Here was his hand:

AQJ1086 Q84 AK5 8

He plucked the 1 spade card from the bid box and sat it confidently on the table. To his delight, the 2 spade card appeared in front of Xena. He nearly jumped all the way to game, but he recalled his lesson from the night before and bid 3 spades, just inviting. Then Xena, with scarcely a pause, put him straightaway in game. The opponent tabled the queen of diamonds and down came dummy:

K65 976 97 KQJ43

Xylon won the diamond ace, drew trump in 2 rounds, and continued with a club, South winning the ace. South now lay a small heart on the table

and Xylon went into the tank. He finally played a small heart, which North took with the 10. Whomp came the heart ace, whack the heart king. Heart honors fell from all sides and Xylon was down one.

Xena asked him how many points he had had. "Sixteen," he replied, "plus a singleton club." Xena smiled and reassured him he had done the right thing. "Sometimes you don't get the result you deserve," she reassured him, "even when you bid correctly." She spoke this even as she assembled her next hand, which revealed this fine collection:

AQJ8 J8653 7 AK4

Although inwardly excited by her 15 count, she maintained a calm exterior and opened 1 heart. Now when Xylon played his 2 heart card, Xena felt certain that she should invite game, so she tabled her 3 heart card. But oh how disappointed she was to see Xylon pass. "Oh well," she thought to herself. "He is quite a good bridge student. I'm certain he has done the right thing." South led the ace of diamonds and Xylon tabled the dummy:

1062 KQ92 9753 65

"Please don't criticize me, Xena," he exclaimed. "I know I only have 5 points, but just remember our instructor always tells us to stretch to show a fit."

South won the 1st trick, but then Xena trumped his diamond king. A clever woman, she next lead the heart jack, taken by North. Xena ruffed the next diamond and played a trump to dummy, both opponents following. She called for the spade 10, the opponent covered with the king, Xena capturing it with her ace. The rest was easy and Xena made 5.

# Game Tries

## page two

“Oh good, 650 points!” she exclaims. “No,” pipes up North. “Just 200. You bid only 3 hearts.”

Even though the novices managed to play a 46% game, which didn't displease them, they were haunted by their first two hands. Would the vicissitudes of fate so often bring such disappointing results and so frequently reward diligent application of the bidding rules with such surprising failures? They stopped at a local pub for supper and libation. By chance they found a group of duplicate players already seated and discussing the afternoon's cards. Although they started to sit at their own table, hearty invitations came from those already seated, and the newcomers were invited to join the table and the discussion.

After reminding the group of their names and answering questions about how it felt to play for the first time and how had they done and so forth, the group returned to the talk they were having about the hands. To the surprise of the novices, the immediate subject was the very two hands that had been haunting them. As it turns out, Xena's and Xylon's decisions on those hands had been, by and large, the decisions made by nearly all the players in the entire field. Practically everyone had gone down when they had expected to make and had made 11 tricks when they had expected to make but a partscore. Of those present, only Charlie and his partner Liz had stopped short on the first board and bid game on the second.

Charlie had the respect of them all, it seemed, so Xylon asked him if there were some advanced knowledge that he possessed that led him to the right decisions on the two difficult boards. He answered that the information was

possibly advanced, but that it wasn't really difficult to understand, and there was no reason why it should be a mystery to them.

“Just as you seek a fit with partner by the number of trumps you hold in common, so also do you need to discover if the high card points you possess match up with the needs of partner's hand,” lectured Charlie. “Look again at the two hands of the first board.” And to nearly everyone's amazement, he was able to recall all the cards of the hand and to write them down neatly on a napkin:

AQJ1086 Q84 AK5 8  
and  
K65 976 97 KQJ43

“Notice,” he said, “that responder's values are in the same suit as opener's singleton, where they are wasted and do no good. At the same time, consider hearts. Here is where opener needs to find values in responder's hand, but responder has nothing there. The two hands have a very good trump fit, but the hands themselves don't fit together.”

“So what?” piped up Sophie, who Xena and Xylon knew was a life master. “What good does it do to make a comparison on a napkin in a bar when there ain't nothing you can do about it at the bridge table? I invited partner with 16 points and a singleton, and she clearly accepted with 9 points and a doubleton. We went down. That's all there is to it!”

Charlie smiled and asked, “Well, how did you invite her?”

“How did I invite her?” intoned Sophie, “The same way everybody invites everybody. I bid 3 spades.”

“Well,” explained Charlie patiently, “not everyone invites that way. Take me and Liz, for instance. We use Short Suit Game Tries.”

# Game Tries

## page three

“All right,” grumbled Sophie, “so be a good professor and explain what a Short Suit Game Try is.”

“Very simple,” said Charlie. “Anyone can do it. When the auction goes bid 1 and raise 1, as it did here, 1 spade and 2 spades, then opener with invitational values bids any shortness he has in his hand. So in this case, Liz didn’t bid 3 spades, like the rest of you did. She bid 3 clubs. That told me she had invitational values with shortness in clubs. My job now is very simple. If I have just 6 points OUTSIDE of clubs, I can raise to game. If I don’t have 6 points outside of clubs, I stay at the 3 level. On this hand, even though I have 9 total points, I have only 3 outside of the club suit, and therefore I stop at 3 spades. We were able to see that my values in clubs were wasted and that our cards didn’t fit together.”

Everyone was just a little stunned, but it all made sense. The wisdom of it really struck Xylon. Why should the raise to 3 spades be the only way to invite someone? There were a lot of different bids available beside 3 spades. It seemed so obvious that those extra bids should be used to solve the kind of problem that Charlie had illustrated. “Let’s start doing that, Xena,” he encouraged. “Makes sense to me,” she said. Then she turned back to Charlie. “Where do we mark that on our convention card, and do we have to alert it?” she asked.

“Yes, you alert it all right,” said Charlie. “And you mark it in the box where you write down your limit raises and Drury and all that stuff. There are a couple of lines at the bottom of that box, and you write it down here. Look at my card. See, just write ‘SSGT’ for Short Suit Game Tries.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” chimed in Sophie. “Just go ahead and fill up their minds with all that fancy crap. You keep on talking long enough and you’ll have their heads spinnin’ and their eyeballs rollin’ across the floor. Take my word for it, novices. Just keep it simple and you’ll be much better off. That fancy stuff ain’t worth the trouble it takes to remember it. It will just get you in a heap of trouble. In fact, if you think what he’s sayin’ is so great, then ask him how he bid game on the 2nd board. I’ve got a napkin, too, you know, and Charlie ain’t the only one who can remember 52 cards. Here, I’ll write it down.”

AQJ8 J8653 7 AK4  
and  
1062 KQ92 9753 65

“See what I mean?, chirped Sophie. “Opener bids 1 heart, responder raises to 2. Now the fancy Professor, with the stronger hand, bids 3 diamonds to show his diamond shortness. But look! Responder doesn’t have 6 points outside of diamonds! He doesn’t even have 6 points period. So responder has to stop at 3 hearts just like the rest of us. That’s how these fancy guys are. They brag about how a fancy bid works on one hand, but it doesn’t even work at all on the very next hand!”

Charlie started laughing. He picked up his beer, took a big swig, and then he leaned back in his chair and laughed some more. “See how easy it is to learn that Short Suit Game Try? Even Sophie has learned it faster than she can drain a schooner of Extra Special Bitter.”

“It happens to be Hefeweisen,” snorts Sophie.

“Whatever,” retorts Charlie. “The trouble is that one fancy bid, so-called, isn’t quite enough

# Game Tries

page four

to handle all the circumstances.”

“Oh what a treat!” cackles Sophie. “It sounds like this is our lucky day. The professor is going to give us a second lecture.”

“Please do,” requests Xena, sitting up in her chair, as if to show that some of the group, at least, was interested in what Charlie had to say. I’ll buy you another beer, if that’s what it takes.”

“No need for that,” answers Charlie. “I learned long ago that Sophie, bless her heart, is not a good barometer for measuring the social atmosphere.”

“Well, la-tee-dah!”

“The fact is,” continued Charlie, “that I didn’t use Short Suit Game Try on the 2nd hand. I raised to 3 hearts, just like the rest of you, and Liz, with her 5 points, raised me to game.”

“Well, please excuse me if I start sounding like Sophie, Charlie,” apologized Xylon, “but it sounds almost like you’re making her case. If you used Short Suit Game Try on the first hand, why didn’t you use it on the second.”

“That’s a fair question,” explained Charlie, “On the second hand, where I had the 15 points, I have a very special identifiable problem. My trump suit is lousy. I know how I stand in the side suits. I don’t care what partner has in those. All I care about is just one thing: how good are partner’s trumps. If hers are lousy, too, then I’ll lose 3 trump tricks plus a diamond and maybe a spade. I just need to know about partner’s trumps, so that’s what I ask her about.”

“But didn’t you say that over your partner’s 2 hearts you bid 3 hearts?” asked Xylon?

“Yes,” answered Charlie. “That’s what 3 hearts means to us. It’s a Trump Suit Game Try. When we raise the suit to 3 as a game try, we are asking partner to bid 4 with good trump and to stop at 3 with only poor trump. When I bid 3 hearts, Liz evaluated her hearts. They are clearly good ones, so she raised to game, which, as you know, is the successful bid. It’s also the right bid. Remember the first part of our talk. You are looking to see, not just if there is a trump fit, but if the hands fit. I told partner what it would take for her hand to fit mine. She had it, she bid it, we made it.”

“Wow!” piped up Xena. “That’s really interesting! I didn’t know there was so much to it! So do we write TSGT for Trump Suit Game Try on our convention card and alert it when we use it?”

“Oh, Boy,” laughed Charlie. “Talking about things always seems to make them harder than they really are. Yes, you alert the bid. No, you don’t write TSGT on your card. The Trump Suit Game Try is part of another collection of game try bids called Help Suit Game Tries. You’re in the bridge class, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” answered Xena.

“Then get the rest from your instructor. He can explain Help Suit Game Tries in an organized way that makes it seem as simple as it is. If you really want a challenge, ask him about Kokish Game Tries.”

“I think I’ll stick with just Help Suit Game Tries to start with,” laughed Xena,

“Hey Sophie,” taunted Charlie. “I’ll invite you to a game of darts.”

“Now you’re getting out of your league,” Sophie replied, pushing her chair back from the table and picking up her Hefeweisen.

# Game Tries

page five

## Help Suit Game Tries

When one partner has game invitational values and wants to suggest a game, he doesn't have to rely just on partner's point count. Instead, he can make a descriptive bid about his own hand to find out if the high cards in the two hands will work together or not. One method of doing this is the Help Suit Game Try. When using this agreement in its simplest form:

the inviter bids the suit in which he needs help. If the partner holds values in that suit, then he bids game. If responder does not have honors in that suit, then he can stop at partscore.

One variation of Help Suit is Trump Suit Game Try. In this case, the inviter is revealing a weak trump suit and asking partner for good trump. With good trump, partner raises to game. With poor trump, he declines. The following auction is a Trump Suit Game Try:

opener	responder
1♥	2♥
3♥	

In standard bidding the call of 3 hearts just shows any invitational hand. But with Help Suit Game Try, it specifically says that help is needed in trump.

Remember to alert any Help Suit Game Try since any ask for help carries a specific message that differs from standard bidding. On your convention card, go to the area that discusses major suit raises and, at the bottom, write in HSGT.

## Help Suit vs. Short Suit

You learned to play Short Suit Game Tries from Charlie in the bar. Many players omit Short Suit and play Help Suit all the time. In this case, when they make an invitational bid, they are never bidding shortness. Instead, they are bidding the suit they want partner to help with.

opener	responder
1♠	2♠
3♦	

Playing Help Suit, opener needs help with diamonds. Notice that this tells the responder, and the defenders where opener's hand is weak. If responder can't bid game, where do you think the defenders are going to attack? That's right. They'll attack the weak suit.

This drawback to Help Suit can be avoided by following Charlie's advice to play Short Suit when the auction begins 1 of a major raised to 2 of the major. On other auctions, we will use Help Suit, but on the bid 1, raise 1 auction, use Short Suit. So, on the auction above, the call of 3 diamonds should show a singleton or void in diamonds and responder will raise to game with 6 HCPs outside out the short suit.

So, having agreed to play Short Suit Game Tries when opener bids a major which is raised to 2 by responder, and to play Help Suit otherwise, when exactly are we using Help Suit?

opener	responder
1♣	1♠
2♠	3♥

This is Help Suit. When responder is raised, he uses Help Suit with 9+ to 12- points.

# Game Tries

## page six

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♦	1♠	P	2♠
P	3♣		

The overcaller's 3 club call is a Help Suit Game Try. His clubs are a weak spot and he is asking partner for high cards in clubs. Some students wonder why the Help Suit bidder wouldn't bid diamonds in this case. Won't the overcaller be weak in diamonds and need help there? Not necessarily. The overcaller may be short in diamonds, so he doesn't need help there.

Use Short Suit Game Tries when opener bids a major and responder raises to 2. Otherwise, use Help Suit Game Tries. Trump Suit Game Try is always on.

Resort to Help Suit whenever the auction doesn't begin bid 1, raise 1. So Help Suit applies when responder is inviting opener or when there has been an overcall.

### When to Ask For Help?

Okay, so you have entered an auction and you want to make a game try, and you are either responder or an overcaller. The kind of game try to make is a Help Suit Game Try. How do you proceed?

**RULE 1:** You need at least a queen in a suit to ask for help. With 3 small you don't need help – you need a miracle. To ask for help, you may hold Qxx, Kxx, Axx, QJx, or KJx. You have some strength but losers also.

**RULE 2:** Always bid the cheapest suit with which you need help. If you skip over a suit, then you don't need help with it.

### What is Help?

Partner has made a Help Suit Game Try. You want to respond properly, but what are you looking for? Real help would consist of two honor cards. Read RULE 1 just above. Obviously 2 honors are help. Just as obviously, no honors are no help. A doubleton is not help. A singleton is probably help (hopefully this isn't the time partner has KJx), but actual honor cards are the most desirable. So with 2 honors bid game, with no honors bid partscore.

But what if you have just 1 honor? Then you have partial help. You can show partial help by bidding a new suit:

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♦	1♠	P	2♠
P	3♣	P	3♥

Partner has asked for help with clubs. When we then answer with 3 hearts, saying neither yes nor no, we are saying that we do have some help in clubs (at least Jxx), and we also have some help in hearts. Now we have put the ball back in partner's court. He has heard a rather detailed report on our hand. He can decide if what he has heard qualifies us for game or partscore.

The days of inviting with just one bid are over. Now when you want to invite, you can do so by giving some sort of description of your hand at the same time that you show your extra values. When partner hears your description – be it a short short or a help suit – he is better able to answer your invitation based on an estimation of the total fit of the two hands. If, perchance, you do need just an overall statement of strength from partner, bid 2NT.