

GAME TRIES

Long-Suit Game Tries

Suppose you have opened 1♠ with (a) ♠AK1093 ♥7 ♦KJ93 ♣A84 and want to try for game after partner raises to 2♠. Playing *standard* methods, you would bid 3♦, your longest side suit. In general, *honor-cards* in partner's long suits are bullish, and weakness (especially three small) is bearish, and bidding your longest side suit helps partner evaluate his hand accurately.

Now let's change your cards but leave your hand-pattern the same: (b) ♠QJ983 ♥7 ♦AKQ9 ♣QJ4. If you bid 3♦ as your game try with (b), partner won't be able to evaluate his hand accurately at all. He can't have the ♦A, ♦K or ♦Q because you have them all, and if he has two or three small diamonds, that won't hurt you at all. The honor-cards that will *help* you are the ♣A and ♣K. So your best game try is 3♣. A game try like this 3♣ is sometimes called a "Help-Suit Game Try," but it is actually a standard *long-suit* try used intelligently.

Hands like (b) are the exception, not the rule. Although it is not a good idea *in general* to make your game try in an AKQx suit, there are times in which you must. With (c) ♠AQ873 ♥AKQ6 ♦95 ♣87, for example, you have no game try that would be truly helpful to partner, but 3♥ is necessary to reach the *right* game, 4♥, when partner has four or five hearts, e.g. (d) ♠K64 ♥108732 ♦A43 ♣92. 4♠ can fail on a 4-1 trump split, but you'll make 4♥ by ruffing out the spades. When spades split 3-2 and hearts 3-1, you'll make game in either major, but you'll make an overtrick only if you play your game in *hearts*.

In short, you should seek game in your *better* major-suit fit when it is possible that you have fits in both majors. You may have a 4-4, 5-4, 4-5, even a 5-5 fit in *hearts* when partner raises your 1♠ opening to 2♠, and need a way to find it. Similar reasons exist for opener to make a natural game try of 2♠ after partner raises a 1♥ opening to 2♥.

Short-Suit Game Tries

Continuing to examine your game tries after partner raises your 1♠ opening to 2♠, ask yourself what game try you would like to make with (e) ♠AQJ93 ♥7 ♦A874 ♣A104. There's not much difference between your clubs and diamonds, and a standard 3♦ game try might result in missing game when partner has lots of help in *clubs*, e.g. (f) ♠K106 ♥9843 ♦62 ♣KJ93.

Suppose you held (f). Fearing that your clubs might be pulling little weight, you would retreat to 3♠, rejecting partner's natural 3♦ game try, only to find that the hands meshed perfectly and watch helplessly as partner guessed clubs correctly to make two overtricks in 3♠.

Perhaps something like that happened Edgar Kaplan forty-some-odd years ago. If only he had been able to bid 3♥ *showing a singleton*, he may have thought, his partner would know to be bearish with strength in hearts but bullish with strength in *either* minor. So Kaplan invented *Short-Suit Game Tries*, which became all the rage among the younger experts of that era.

There are some flies in the SSGT ointment. Kaplan saw one of them: if the 1♠ opener's 3♥ rebid shows a *singleton* heart, what can opener do to find a superior *heart fit* when he has four or five hearts? Kaplan swatted that fly by saying that opener should make his short-suit try in a minor, but responder should "raise" that minor to accept game and show four or more cards in the *unbid* major. Those of us who embraced short-suit tries adopted this adjunct, but we are still waiting to swat two other flies:

(1) How can you try for game when you have no singleton or void? What if you have a hand like (c), with a 4-card side suit and two small doubletons?

(2) If you've opened 1♥ and want to try for game after a 2♥ raise, must you bid 2♠ to make a short-suit try in spades? That lets LHO double with impunity to show spades and encourage RHO to take a profitable spade sacrifice.

Two-Way Game Tries

Bob Ewen, one of the young players who embraced short-suit tries initially, use his fly-swatter to kill *all* the flies. By relinquishing 2NT as a natural game try showing a balanced hand, you can accommodate both kinds of game tries. After a raise of a 1♠ opening to 2♠, you have a choice: you can either bid 3♣, 3♦ or 3♥ as a short-suit try, or bid a "puppet" 2NT as a prelude to a long-suit try. Partner must reply 3♣ to your 2NT, and then your 3♦ or 3♥ is a long-suit try in that red suit but your 3♠ is a long-suit try in *clubs*, the suit you cannot bid without going beyond three of the agreed suit (spades).

After a raise of a 1♥ opening to 2♥, the only puppet bid that will accommodate long-suit tries in all suits is 2♠. Then, following your partner's required 2NT next, your 3♣ or 3♦ is a long-suit try in that minor but your 3♥ is a long-suit try in *spades*, the suit you cannot bid without going beyond three of the agreed suit (hearts). To force to game with four spades, you must bid 3♠ instead of 3♥. Notice that because your 2♠ does not show spade shortness (and may be based on spade length), LHO can seldom double safely. With a short-suit try in a minor, you bid 3♣ or 3♦ directly, and with a short-suit try in spades, you bid a surrogate 2NT.

Do you lose anything by playing Two-Way Game Tries? Can you afford to relinquish 2NT as a natural game try? Yes, if you play *strong* notrumps. If your hand is notrumpish, you'd have opened 1NT; if your hand isn't notrumpish, you shouldn't want to seek a notrump contract after partner raises your major anyway.

No, if you play *weak* notrumps or *kamikaze* notrumps, as you need natural 2NT rebids to show notrumpish hands in the strong-notrump range.

The Long and Short of It

As the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge* notes, some devotees of Two-Way Game Tries reverse Bob's procedure, making direct tries with long suits and using the cheap puppet bids to initiate short-suit tries.

I prefer a combination that I call *The Long and Short of It*. After 1♠-2♠, use long-suit tries, with 2NT (a puppet to 3♣) being a prelude to a subsequent short-suit try. After 1♥-2♥, use short-suit tries as in Bob's scheme, with 2♠ (a puppet to 2NT) being a prelude to a subsequent long-suit try.

Suppose you and your partner have agreed to play *The Long and Short of It* or some other version of Two-Way Game Tries. You may want to add the bells and whistles I am about to describe. However, you needn't add them. I like adjuncts that can be added or omitted depending on each pair's degree of comfort with complexity.

The Revolt of the Puppets

Sometimes responder is strong enough to accept any game try that opener might make. Sometimes he's too weak to accept any try. In either of these cases, it's worse than pointless for him to let opener show in which suit he has a long-suit or short-suit try, for the information can only help the defenders. Instead, responder may simply bid three of the agreed major to reject game, four of the agreed major to accept, keeping the defenders in the dark.

If you play either Ewen's version of Two-Way Game Tries or mine (*The Long and Short of It*), you must take care as responder after 1♥-2♥; 2♠ (undisclosed long suit). To accept game with four or five spades, you should bid 3♠ instead of 4♥. Then opener can choose in which major to play game.

Lone Rejection Bids

If you like the idea of having responder *preempt* opener's intended message when he doesn't care in which suit opener is making the try, you can carry it further still by adding *lone rejection bids*. After 1♠-2♠; 2NT, responder's 3♦ and 3♥ are idle. You can define these bids as *rejecting* a try in the suit bid but accepting tries in the other two suits; then opener can simply bid game if he has a try in an unbid suit and the defenders won't know in which of those two suits it is. If his try was in responder's *lone rejection suit*, opener signs off with 3♠. Likewise, after 1♥-2♥; 2♠, responder's 3♣ and 3♦ are idle. You can define these similarly as *lone rejection bids*.

Weak-Suit Game Tries

Long before there were any kinds of game tries other than long-suit tries, some clever players, wanting to stop the opening leader from leading a particular suit (perhaps because they had three small in that suit) would "psych" a long-suit game try. After 1♠-2♠; 3♦-4♠, they could expect an opening lead in clubs or hearts, but not in diamonds. After 1♠-2♠; 3♦-3♠, they would bid 4♠ anyway and hope the opening leader didn't see through the deception.

That was legitimate.

However, if opener tries for game with a new-suit bid that usually *shows* three small in the suit, and responder is expected to accept or reject game accordingly, that's a bird of another feather entirely, called a *Weak-Suit Game Try*. It must be alerted and explained as such. To gain an unfair advantage against opponents who don't know how to inquire, many users of the convention call it misleadingly, a "Help-Suit Game Try." If you encounter such opponents, be sure to ask them what kind of "help suit" opener shows. Then, if you learn that it's a weak suit, you should almost invariably lead that suit through dummy.