

Game Try Bids “Tell or Ask”

By Neil H. Timm

Playing the 2/1 Game Force Bidding System, after the sequence one of a major followed by two of a major, the two level bid is semi-constructive and shows between 8-10 Dummy/Support points; however, some may use 6-9 HCP, depending on your agreement. If you play 6-9, I have included a special Game Try Method, which I call the Point Count Game Try (PCGT). Knowing you have a 5-3 fit in the major, how do you investigate whether or not game is possible? There are several commonly used methods played by club members. Briefly the methods used using 8-10 Dummy/Support points are:

(1) Long suit game try (LSGT) – After a single raise, opener shows extra values by bidding a second suit naturally at the lowest level (e.g. 1♥-2♥-3♣; 1♠-2♠-3♦). Responder can promote length and/or high-card values in that suit, or shortness combined with an extra trump, and jump to game. Or, responder with weakness in opener's second suit will sign off. When bidding the long suit, it usually shows first or second round control in the bid suit, an A/K.

(3) Help suit game try (HSGT) – This agreement is similar to the long suit game try, but more accurate. Responder should expect opener to hold at least three small cards in the new suit (although the holding may in fact be better, perhaps as good as KJx). Then, regardless of point count, responder bids game with zero or one loser in that suit and signs off with three losers in that suit. With two losers in that suit, responder bids according to point count. This sometimes referred to as Weak Suit Game Try.

(2) Short suit game try (SSGT) – With this agreement, opener bids a short suit (singleton, void, or perhaps a doubleton) at the lowest level, showing extra values and, by implication, side length in the unbid suits. Or bids the next step (2♠, over 2♥ or 2NT over 2♠) which asks responder to show shortness.

(4) 2NT game try (2NTGT) – a less common alternative method suggested by Marty Bergen (1985) in his book “Better Bidding with Bergen, Volume I - Uncontested Auctions” page 148, following Lebensohl, is to make the artificial asking game try bid of 2NT. By agreement, this is no longer natural but asks responder to show shortness; without shortness (e.g. 4-3-3-3 distribution) he returns to the bid major at the 3-level with a minimum or bids 3NT with a maximum.

(5) Combined Long & Short Suit (CLSHST) – Combine long, short and even general strength-based game tries using the following (after 1M-2M): Step 1 = Short suit game try, asking responder to show a singleton, or bid step 1 otherwise, after which opener will show the suit he is short in, with 3M being a surrogate for spades (if hearts agreed) or clubs (if spades agreed). Step 2 = General game try,

asking responder to show 6 to 8 points via a step 1 to 3 response, or to bid 3NT with a flat maximum and 4M with any other maximum. Step 3 to 5 = Long (or 'Help') suit game tries with 3M (step 5) being a surrogate try in spades (if hearts agreed) or clubs (if spades agreed).

As you review the five selected methods, observe that they become more complicated as you move from one to five, and that some are telling methods or asking methods or both. And of course there are many more complicated game try methods like the Kokish Game Try, Nagy's Game Try, Reverse Romax Game Try's, and many more. I will not discuss these, but look more carefully at the more commonly used club methods (1-4) above, since five is a combination. Is there a "best" or "preferred" method?

After hearing simple major suit raise, the most commonly used club method is to show a second suit or the LSGT. For example you may hold the following hand:

(a) ♠AKJ54 ♥86 ♦97 ♣AQJ7

Bid 3♣, telling your partner and your opponents where you have strength and perhaps by inference where you have weakness, in the unbid suits.

The most used method is not to show strength but to ask for help in the bid suit (HSGT). For example, suppose you have the following hand:

(b) ♠AKJ97 ♥AK ♦97 ♣8762

Again one bids 3♣; however, it is asking partner for help in clubs. This is an asking bid and communicates to partner and the opponents EXACTLY where your weakness resides.

Clearly looking at the two approaches so far, the LSGT is better than the HSGT; it communicates less to your opponents.

A third method attributed to Kaplan-Sheinwold is the SSGT.

(c) ♠AKJ54 ♥K86 ♦KJ75 ♣7

Now the bid of 3♣ shows shortness. While it is a telling bid, it does not give the opponents too much information since if the suit is led it is not too damaging and you have strength in the unbid suits. So we should prefer this method to either the LSGT or HSGT methods. But, we have a small problem, how do you use it with either hands (a) or (b). There is no shortness! Now you DO NOT TELL, but ask! You make the artificial bid of 2NT over the bid of 2♠; this asks partner to show shortness. Note also that with hands (a) and (c) that there is no clear HSGT asking bid.

Given the three methods: LSGT, HSGT, and SSGT, one would clearly prefer the SSGT asking sequence.

Short Suit Game Try Bids*

1♥-2♥-2♠* (ask)

- 3♣* = shows shortness in clubs
- 3♦* = shows shortness in diamonds
- 2NT* = shows shortness in spades
- 3♥* = 4333 Minimum (8/9 dummy points)
- 3NT* = 4333 Maximum (10 Dummy points)
- 3♠* = 4333 Maximum with four spades
- 4m* = 5+ to KQ in minor bid with Maximum
- 4♥* = Stiff other major with Maximum

1♠-2♠-2NT* (ask)

- 3♣* = shows shortness in clubs
- 3♦* = shows shortness in diamonds
- 3♥* = shows shortness in hearts
- 3♠* = 4333 Minimum (8/9 dummy points)
- 3NT* = 4333 Maximum (10 Dummy points)
- 4m* = 5+ to KQ in minor bid with Maximum
- 4♠* = Stiff other major with Maximum

Shortness is always 1 or 0 cards in the suit. After SSGT, responder re-evaluates his hand with A=3 and K=1

With 9 or 10 responder bids game or cue bids minor with 4 of other majors

With 7 or 8 make last train bid if possible

With 6 or less sign-off

If opener bids at the three levels, he is showing (telling) shortness in the bid suit and not using the relay asking bids.

A game try that is very similar to the SSGT is the Eric Kokish 3-way game tries.

Kokish Game Try Bids*

1♥-2♥-2♠* (asks partner would accept a HSGT i.e. a reverse HSGT)

- 2NT* = shows shortness in spades where 3♥ denies

- 3♣* = shows shortness in clubs where 3♥ denies
- 3♦* = shows shortness in diamond where 3♥ denies
- 3♥* = Trump suit GT

1♠-2♠-2NT* (asks partner where he would accept a GT i.e. a reverse HSGT)

- 3♣* = shows shortness in clubs where 3♠ denies
- 3♦* = shows shortness in diamond where 3♠ denies
- 3♥* = show shortness in hearts where 3♠ denies
- 3♠* = Trump Suit GT

4M accepts GT

Marty Bergen suggests to always using the 2NT* bid as an asking Game Try bid over the major suit raise: 1M-2M whether hearts or spades. Unlike Kokish Game Try's where 2NT is used to ask, "where is your stuff", the bid of 2NT asks where is your shortness --- similar to the SSGT relay bids. His bids follow.

2NT Game Try*

1M-2M-2NT* (asking for doubleton or singleton)

- 3♣* = shows shortness in clubs
- 3♦* = shows shortness in diamonds
- 3oM* = shortness in the major
- 3 of trump suit = 4333 Minimum (8/9 dummy points)
- 3NT = 4333 Maximum (10 Dummy points)
- 4m* = splinter (singleton/void) or 5+ to KQ in minor bid with Maximum (GF)

Responses by Opener

- 4♥/♠ - does not like the shortness bid or has values for games
- 3♥/♠ - shows no game interest
- 3NT – to play 4333
- Bids a new suit with game/ slam interest

***Note – I have assumed 8-10 Dummy/Support Points -- if your agreement is 6-9 points, you will have to adjust the point ranges.**

What happens when the opponent's interfere at the two-level or double?

It should not matter, whether you use the SSGT or 2NTGT Methods, the relay bids of 2NT/ 2♠ are always the shortness-asking bids, depending on the method, provided either might be made.

Point Count Game Try

This method depends entirely on points, is very simple and perhaps unknown to many 2/1 Game Force players. After 1M-2M, where 2M denotes 6-9 Dummy/Support points, the opener re-evaluates his hand and with 16 “Bergen Points” bids 2NT over 2♠ and 2♠ over 2♥; these bids are the same as the SSGT bids, they now become point count asking bids playing the Point Count Game Try (PCGT) system of bids. The PCGT bids and asks follow.

1♠-2♠-2NT (ask- Opener has 16 points)

- 3♠* = 6 Points - Sign-Off
- 3♥* = 7 Points
- 3♦* = 8 Points
- 3♣* = 9 Points
- 4♠* = 10 Points

Note that with only 6 points that a simple raise to the 3-level raise is a sign-off bid. And the bids are in descending order.

However, with a response of 3♣ (9 Points), the opening bidder may ask about the trump suit, by bidding 3♦ over 3♣.

3♦* = asks do you have a 0-1 or 2+ high-card points in the trump suit, Queen or better?

- 3♥* = Jack or Less
- 3♠* = Queen or More

Opener now Passes or bids Game! May also cue bid or use RKCB.

1♥-2♥-2♠* (ask – opener has 16 points to ask)

- 3♥* = 6 Points – Sign-Off
- 3♦* = 7 Points
- 3♣* = 8 Points
- 2NT* = 9 Points
- 4♥* = 10 Points

Note that with only 6 points that a simple raise to the 3-level raise is a sign-off bid. And again the bids are in descending order.

However, with a response of 3♣ (8 Points), the Opening bidder may again ask about the trump suit, by bidding 3♦ over 3♣.

3♦*= asks do you have a 0-1 or 2+ high-card points in the trump suit, Queen or better?

- 3♥* = Jack or Less
- 3♠* = Queen or More

Opener now Passes or bids Game! May also Cue bid or use RKCB.

Losing Trick Count

Instead of playing either “help suit” or the “game try” asking/telling bids, one may consider the Losing Trick Count (LTC) method. With this approach, opener bids game with 5 losing tricks, invites with 6 losing tricks, and passes with 7 losing tricks. **“The Rule of 5-6-7”**.

Recall that using the LTC method that a simple raise equates to approximately 9 losers. Hence using the LTC formula $24 - 5 - 9 = 10$ tricks or game. With six losers, one can invite and with 7 losers, opener must pass.

The 1-2-3 Method

This approach is often used instead of the LTC method when Playing Help Suit Game Try. After a Help Suit bid, one merely bids game when having one loser in the suit. With three losers, one bids the Major at the three levels. With two losers, one employs JUDGEMENT! The 1-2-3 Method can also be used if you play SSGT or the 2NTGT. It is very helpful and simple.