

Help-Suit/Game-Try

Consider these Partnership hands:

♠AQJ53	♠K74
♥98	♥T7342
♦A632	♦K3
♣A6	♣754

The first hand naturally Opens with 1♠ and Partner, equally naturally, replies 2♠. The Good 15 HCP hand or (conservatively) 18 PP hand could go down in flames at the 4-level if Partner has 2♥ and 3♦ losers. Even by LTC evaluation Opener is a 6-LTC and Responder promised a 9-LTC, at best it's a 3-level Partnership hand. But still with 18PP opposite 6+ PP one might be tempted to suggest Game. But how? 3♠ is a lie, we only have 5. Examination of the Opening hand suggests 2 fast ♥ and 2 slow ♦ losers and 1 slow ♣ loser; game seems out of the question – unless partner has only 1♦ loser which we can cover with the ♦A. If that is the case then our hand only has 3 losers. So we tell Partner we need help in ♦'s by bidding 3♦. Thus after the show of minimum support in a Major suit 1♠ – P – 2♠ – P; a 3 level bid of a new suit is asking for help in that suit. Such a 3♦, or 3♣ or 3♥ bid is often referred to as a test bid. In our example if Partner's ♦ suit, the test suit, is limited to 1 loser Responder bids Game in ♠'s; and if he has more than 1♦ loser, the bid is the safer 3♠.

It should be clear that the Help-Suit/Game-Try Convention is invoked when the Opener, holding a better than minimum Opener (i.e. 16+ HCP or 6 LTC), foresees or still wants to check the possibility of a Game Contract in the face of a minimum support. This is generally done when needing some help in a single **long-suit**. The Bidding statement made by the 3-level Bid is: “Another name for this convention is **Long-Suit/Game-Try** meaning I have a long suit with losers that I need your trump to cover”. This description suggests that there might be a corollary convention, **Short-Suit/Game-Try**. There is indeed! And we'll get to it next. To tie up our discussion of Help-Suit/Game-Try we can see that Responder does indeed have 1♦ loser and now the Partnership has no ♦ losers and with only 3 other losers Game is assured. To summarize: After a 1M – P – 2M – P; a 3level shift to a second suit is asking Partner if he can help in that suit to wit having at worst 1 loser in the suit.

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Now consider these Partnership hands:

♠AJT	♠K74
♥K9864	♥A742
♦2	♦9753
♣KQ63	♣74

After the left hand Opens 1♥ and gets a 2♥ response the Opener thinks his values outside of the Trump suit warrant further investigation, if, if only Partner doesn't have wasted values in ♦, the small Trump in Opener's hand can be used to harvest tricks in her short suit. With 3 decent suits the Opener's hand could evaluate to near 15 PP if all those little Trump can be put to good use. How to tell? Use **Short-Suit/Game-Try** by bidding ♦, the test suit. The bidding would look just like Long-Suit/Game-Try: 1♥ – P – 2♥ – P; 3♦, i.e. a bid of a second suit by Opener after Responder shows a minimum raise introduces the test suit. We might also recognize the 3♦ bid as a reverse so it could be a legitimate reverse, it could be a **Help-Suit/Game-Try** or it could be a **Short-Suit/Game-Try**. So which is it? A reverse always shows a bigger than minimum hand – a new, second suit at the 3-level is always treated as a reverse. We usually demand 16+ for a reverse but whose quibbling? Partner is suggesting there might be more than a 2-level contract and is seeking further information with this bid; so shouldn't we cooperate? But now, this leaves the decision to either **Long-Suit/Game-Try** or **Short-Suit/Game-Try**? It has to be one or the other, in other words you can't use the same bid to mean two different things; it has to be one or the other. **Help-or Long-Suit/Game-Try** is the more common treatment so let's keep the second suit at the 3-level as **Long-Suit/Game-Try**. Does that

mean that we have to give up **Short-Suit/Game-Try**? Absolutely not – we have a work-around for this dilemma. **But first**, let's finish up with the discussion on **Short-Suit/Game-Try**. The Short-Suit is always a singleton in Opener's hand. If Responder's holding in Opener's Short-Suit is limited to 1 loser or has no wasted values, he bids Game; and if he has more than 1 loser in the bid is a safer 3-level. Hands considered good for Game are Axx, xxx, xxxx, Jxx, Jxxx. Poor holdings are KQ, KQx, Kxx, AKx. Those points are better if they are in the other suits.

Having Your Cake and Eating it too!

Since the Game going response in both **Help-Suit/Game-Try** and **Short-Suit/Game-Try** are the same one might jump to the conclusion that the meaning of the 3♦ query was the same. It is not. In the Long or Help case the query is asking if his, the Declarer's losers can be covered by Dummy's Trump, in the Short case the query is asking if the Dummy has losers in that suit that Declarer's Trump can be used to eliminate.

In order to keep both **Help-Suit/Game-Try** and **Short-Suit/Game-Try** in your bidding arsenal requires you to give up the normal meaning of 2NT in the 1-of-a-Major, 2-of-a-Major, 2NT sequence, where normally the 2NT rebid is used to show a balanced medium (15-17HCP) Opening hand. After a fit has been found the 2NT invitation generally provides more information (and help) to the opponents than it does to your side so getting rid of it is of little consequence. **Note:** the replacement of 2NT as **Short-Suit/Game-Try** is relevant only in the case of a minimum raise in a Major suit! Both **Game-Try** conventions are limited to Major Suit minimum raises so there are only two bidding sequences to consider for the **Short-Suit** Convention:

1. 1♠ – P – 2♠ – P; 2NT*1 The 2NT Bid here is a Short-suit relay by Opener and responder is expected to bid 3♣. After the 3♣ Bid, the Opener presents the test suit:
 - 3# shows a singleton in # where # is either ♦ or ♥
 - 3♠ shows a singleton in ♠ – since ♠'s is the Trump suit, ♠ becomes the substitute for ♣. If Responder's test suit fits the 'no wasted values' criteria the bid is Game; and if not, the bid is Pass and left at the safer 3♠.
 - If Responder refuses the Relay (i.e. by bidding 3♠) his bid is showing his own singleton; Opener now can decide to bid Game or leave it at 3♠.

1. 1♥ – P – 2♥ – P; 2♠* The 2♠ Bid here is the Short-suit relay so here responder is expected to bid 2NT. After the obligatory 2NT Bid, the Opener presents the test suit:
 - 3# shows a singleton in # where # is either ♣ or ♦
 - 3♥ shows a singleton in ♠ – since ♥'s is the Trump suit, ♥ is the substitute for ♠
 - If Responder has no wasted values in the short-suit he bids Game, otherwise 3♥ or Passes Opener's 3♥.

Examples:

1♥ – P – 2♥ – P; 2♠ – P – 2NT – P; 3♦ – P – 3♥ – P; P – P

2♠ is Short-Suit/Game-Try; 2NT is relay; 3♦ shows Opener's singleton ♦; 3♥ == responder has wasted values so stops below Game-level.

1♥ – P – 2♥ – P; 2♠ – P – 3♣ – P; 3♥ – P – P – P.

2♠ is Short-Suit/Game-Try; Responder refuses relay by bidding his singleton in ♣'s; Opener ascertains Responder's singleton ♣ doesn't help and bids a close-out 3♥.

1 “Partner is asking for further definition of my hand” is your reply to the question about the alert! This is the only Alertable bid in the Long/Short Suit – Game Try family.