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Help Suit Game Tries.

After 1H – (P) – 2H – (P), or 1S – (P) – 2S – (P), an opener with about 15 – 18 high card points,¹ will want to investigate game opposite partner’s single raise.² The old method was to bid three of the agreed upon major, which asked partner if he or she had a minimum or a maximum for the simple raise. With a minimum, responder would pass; with a maximum, responder would bid game. This type of game inquiry did not work well since responder did not know if his honor values were “working” in concert with those in the opener’s hand. Sometimes 8 or 9 points in responder’s hand will not make game opposite opener’s invitational hand; on other occasions, what looks like a minimum raise will be enough for opener to make game.

Here are some examples of this problem. In each case, the opener has the same 16 point hand. Opener opens One Spade and responder makes a simple raise to Two Spades: 1S – (P) – 2S – (P) – ?

<u>Example 1</u>	<u>Example 2</u>	<u>Example 3</u>
Q104	6432	Q63
K962	K962	A10962
862	A862	J6
KJ5	5	952
AKJ75	AKJ75	AKJ75
QJ5	QJ5	QJ5
KQ4	KQ4	KQ4
43	43	43

The responder in Example 1 has a nine count. Using the old-fashioned 1-2-3 method, after opener’s bid of 3S, responder would figure he has a maximum for his 2S bid and bid 4S; however it is very unlikely that the hand will make 4S. The two hands do not work well together. If the Diamond Ace is off-side, declarer will lose at least two Diamonds, one Heart, and one Club. Even if the DA is in front of opener’s K-Q, declarer will be set if both the A-Q of Clubs are over dummy’s K-J, or if declarer misguesses in the Club suit. In game, Declarer is likely to be down one or two.

In Example 2, responder has only seven points, but the hand is almost certain to make 4S. Declarer will lose a Heart and a Club. Declarer will make five if the Spade Queen falls in two rounds and otherwise will make four.

¹ Opener should have a five to six loser hand using Losing Trick Count analysis to make a game try. With extra distribution, opener may want to make a game try on fewer than 15 points.

² With 19+ points, the opener should not make a game try but bid game directly.

In Example 3, responder again has only seven points. Declarer will make four if the Heart King is on declarer's left, losing a Diamond and two Clubs. Declarer should make only three if the Heart King is on declarer's right although, even if the heart finesse fails, defenders could make a defensive error by failing to cash their four tricks before the declarer gets discards on the heart suit. Since declarer has about a 50% chance of making the hand, declarer generally will want to be in game here.

So, in Example 1, where responder had nine points, declarer does NOT want to be in game, but in Examples 2 and 3, where responder had only seven high card points, declarer DOES want to be in game. How do we bid to resolve this? Through a Help Suit Game Try ("HSGT"). The purpose of HSGT's is to determine if the partners' honor cards fit well. Fitting hands are far more likely to make game.

Playing HSGT's, after responder's raise to the two level, the opener with a better than average opener makes the lowest bid of a suit in which he is looking for help. "Help" is defined as the Ace or King of the suit, in order to fill in with opener's honors. If responder has the Ace or King of the suit bid, responder bids on to game. Without the Ace or King, responder usually stops in three of the agreed major but occasionally may make a counter-game try.³ If responder has a maximum raise with 10 support points, game is likely and responder may accept the game try, with or without support in opener's game try suit.

Looking back at the three examples above, in each case, the opener will bid 3D, looking for the Ace of Diamonds to fit with opener's K-Q. In Example 1, responder has three small cards in opener's help suit, the worst possible holding, and values in clubs, a suit declarer did not inquire about. Responder reverts to 3S. The pair properly stays out of game. In Example 2, responder holds the Ace of Diamonds and wisely bids 4S. In Example 3, responder has the J-x of Diamonds, no immediate help there, but has significant help in Hearts, a suit he can show below three of the agreed suit. Over 3D, responder may bid 3H, a counter-game try. Since opener has fitting cards in Hearts, opener can use this information in deciding whether to bid on to game.

Weak Trump Suit Game Tries.

When using Help Suit Game Tries, the old fashioned 1S – 2S – 3S or 1H – 2H – 3H bids can take on a new meaning. I suggest you use this bid to show a weak trump suit game try. Opener has enough points to try for game but has a weak trump suit. Responder can pass the three-level bid, bid on to four of the major, or bid 3NT which is to play. Here are three more examples. In each, the opener rebids 3H after 1H – (P) – 2H – (P).

<u>Example 4</u>	<u>Example 5</u>	<u>Example 6</u>
102	102	Q1072
A86	AQ86	Q106
Q82	Q82	832
J8432	J432	AJ4
AK9	AK9	AK9
J9732	J9732	J9732
AKJ	AKJ	AKJ
Q7	Q7	Q7

³ Responder may make a counter-game try by bidding a higher suit below three of the agreed-upon major in which responder has the Ace or King. If opener has fitting cards in responder's counter-game try suit, opener can bid game. If opener is not satisfied with help in the second suit, opener will revert to three of the major.

In Example 4, the responder has only a minimum raise and no interest in game. Responder passes. The partnership will likely lose two hearts and two clubs.

In Example 5, responder has fine trump support and bids 4H. Barring terrible breaks, declarer is losing at most one trump trick and two clubs.

In Example 6, responder has a good hand but secondary honors and no ruffing value. Responder bids 3NT, which is the partnership's best contract. On practically any defensive distribution, declarer will take at least three spades, three hearts, two diamonds, and a club for a minimum of nine tricks.

1

♠ 94
♥ AKQ104
♦ A1042
♣ K5

♠ AQ653
♥ 83
♦ 85
♣ J1082

♠ K1087
♥ 976
♦ KQJ9
♣ 94

♠ J2
♥ J52
♦ 763
♣ AQ763

Dealer: North
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♦ K

2

♠ J872
♥ 72
♦ J832
♣ AQ6

♠ 1065
♥ KQ103
♦ 754
♣ K43

♠ AK
♥ AJ984
♦ KQ10
♣ 872

♠ Q943
♥ 65
♦ A96
♣ J1095

Dealer: East
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1 ♥	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♣ J

3

♠ 10953
♥ A3
♦ 875
♣ AJ105

♠ QJ72
♥ 1094
♦ AJ4
♣ 964

♠ AK864
♥ KQ76
♦ 62
♣ KQ

Dealer: South
E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♣
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Opening Lead: ♦ K

4

♠ 83
♥ Q982
♦ J109
♣ A1095

♠ A10742
♥ A53
♦ A
♣ KQ64

♠ KQ6
♥ KJ64
♦ 73
♣ 8732

♠ J95
♥ 107
♦ KQ86542
♣ J

Dealer: West
Both Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♦ J

5

♠ KQ7
♥ J10643
♦ AQ5
♣ AQ

♠ J9432
♥ 87
♦ K42
♣ K104

♠ A85
♥ K95
♦ J76
♣ J753

Dealer: North
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	3 NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♦ 10

Palo Alto Bridge Club Lesson
November 13, 2018

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Hand Analysis

1. Dealer has a nice 16 count and opens 1H. (It would be possible to open the hand 1NT but it is more suit-oriented and should be opened 1H.) Responder bids 2H and opener, who has a better than minimum opener, either bids 3C, a help suit game try, or 4H. (3C is a better bid in case responder's values are in spades.) Responder has good fitting club cards and goes to game. The lead is the DK and declarer can see three losers in diamonds and two in spades. Declarer needs to reduce his losers by two and should set up the club suit to discard side suit losers. Declarer needs two entries to set up the clubs. Declarer wins the DA and plays two rounds of trumps with the Ace and King, leaving one trump out, then plays the King and Ace of Clubs. Declarer should not play the Queen of Clubs, but now ruffs a club high, setting up the fourth and fifth clubs as winners. Declarer crosses to the Heart Jack, thereby pulling the last trump (this is called "drawing trumps ending in the dummy"). Declarer is now in the right hand to take two more club winners, discarding two losing spades. Depending on the defenders' discards, declarer will lose two or three diamonds to make four or five hearts.
2. Opener has a nice hand with 17 hcp, and opens 1H. Responder has an 8 count with four trumps and bids 2H. Opener wants to make a game try, so bids 3D, looking for fitting cards in diamonds. Opener needs no help in spades, and the club suit has three losers, so diamonds is the lowest and only suit in which he is looking for help. Responder has no help in diamonds, so reverts to 3H. On the CJ lead, there are three losers in clubs and two in diamonds. If the DA is on side, there is one diamond loser, but when declarer plays a diamond towards the KQ, the DA is off side. Declarer must return to dummy to finesse the D10 to make the hand. It is more likely that the finesse will work than that the Jack will fall under the King or Queen. When the D10 holds, declarer makes 3.
3. Dealer has a 17 count with five spades and opens 1S. Responder has a nine count with a spade fit and bids 2S. Opener makes a game try by bidding 3C, the lowest suit in which opener is looking for help. Responder, holding the AJ10 of clubs, could not have better help and bids 4S. The lead is the DK and defenders rattle off two diamond tricks and force declarer to ruff the third diamond. There are no losers in clubs and the heart loser can be discarded on a high club, so declarer must make sure not to lose two trumps. Declarer cashes the SA to find the bad news: trumps are 4-0. Declarer should cross to dummy in hearts and run the S10. If RHO covers with the Queen or Jack, declarer wins the SK and has the remaining 9 and 8 to hold RHO to one trump trick. If RHO does not cover, declarer wins the Ten and next plays the King to capture the Jack. Either way, declarer loses only one trump trick and makes four.

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4. Dealer opens a spade and responder bids 2S. Opener has a 17 count with three aces and makes a game try in clubs. Responder has no help in clubs (no ace or king) but has the King and Jack of hearts and 9 HCP so makes a counter game try in hearts. Responder's help in hearts fits with declarer's Ace so opener bids game. Declarer should take the heart finesse to avoid losing a trick in that suit. Since clubs break poorly, declarer likely will lose three club tricks to the A, 10 and 9.
5. Declarer has a weak five card heart suit with 18 hcp and opens 1H. Responder has nine points and a heart fit so raises to 2H. Due to the weak trumps, opener should rebid 3H, which shows an invitational hand with poor trumps and responder, with honor cards outside of hearts and no ruffing potential, should bid 3NT. The hand is making game in NT but not in hearts; there are nine tricks in either strain. On the lead of the D10, Declarer takes the losing finesse to East's King. East will return either a spade or a diamond (hearts is declarer's long suit and a club lead is into the jaws of dummy's AQ). Declarer should win in dummy and immediately play on hearts by running the J or 10 to develop three heart tricks. Declarer can take three hearts, three spades, two diamonds and the Ace of Clubs to make three no trump. Defenders take two heart tricks with the Ace and Queen and two minor suit Kings.