

Help Suit Game Tries – Ron Kral

Vul None South deals Lead: ♣ 3	♠ K76 ♥ K108 ♦ Q1082 ♣ 942	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ Q9843 ♥ 93 ♦ A94 ♣ Q8	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">West</th> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">North</th> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">East</th> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">South</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2♥¹</td> <td>Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3♣²</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3♦³</td> <td>Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4♥⁴</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>¹ 6-9 HCP in 2 over 1 ² Help-suit game-try in Clubs ³ I cannot accept a game-try in clubs, but I would accept a help-suit game-try in diamonds ⁴ OK, I have good cards in diamonds too</p>	West	North	East	South				1♥	Pass	2♥ ¹	Pass	3♣ ²	Pass	3♦ ³	Pass	4♥ ⁴
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West	North	East	South																				
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♠ A1052 ♥ 742 ♦ 653 ♣ A73	♠ J ♥ AQJ65 ♦ KJ7 ♣ KJ106																						

Help suit game tries are an important part of modern bidding. Help suit game tries are used whenever the partnership is close to game, but opener needs to know if responder has a maximum or minimum. Help suit game tries are in effect **ONLY** when a **MAJOR** suit has been agreed upon. A simple example might be 1♥, 2♥. The 2♥ bid promises 6-9 HCP (with a 10-12 HCP 3-card limit raise, you'd bid 1NT followed later by 3♥). Say opener has an unbalanced 16 count. Opener needs to know which end of the range responder has. If on the lower end, the partnership has about 22 HCP and belongs in a part score. If on the higher end, the partnership has about 25 HCP and belongs in game. How to find out? Answer: use a help-suit game-try.

Once you've agreed on a major suit, a bid of any other suit asks partner "Are you on the high-end or low-end of your promised range?" Note that it's the **PROMISED** range. There are many different ways to raise partner's suit (limit raises, Bergen raises, Drury, BROMAD, et.al.). Even though some of these are artificial, they're still raises of partner's suit.

The essentials of a help-suit game-try are that you're trying for a "thin" game. What you want to know is if responder's cards are "working" or if they're in suits where they won't help much. The bidder normally has some high cards in the help-suit (say Kxx) and is looking for "fitting" cards in that suit in partner's hand. Here are the rules:

- 1) If responder has the **MINIMUM** of what's already been promised, responder makes the minimum bid in the agreed upon suit. Exception: if you have **GREAT** help-suit support (eg, 2 honors, 4+ cards), bid game anyway (you have a double fit).
- 2) If responder has the **MAXIMUM** of what's already been promised, responder just goes ahead and bids game directly in the agreed upon suit.
- 3) If responder has the **MIDDLE** of the promised range, responder uses the help-suit as a tie-breaker to decide whether or not to bid game. Responder bids game with a "good" holding in the help-suit and rebids the agreed upon suit at the 3-level with a poor holding in the help-suit. Poor help-suit holdings include (worst first):
 - a. Three small (xxx)
 - b. Two small (xx)
 - c. void
 - d. One small (x)

Good holdings include any fragment with one of the top three honors. Some people play a void or singleton is "good" (I don't). Some people think a singleton honor is "bad" (I don't). Discuss with your partner. I recommend the above list as "bad" and **ANY** holding with one of the top 3 honors as "good". Use your judgment with Jxx or a singleton.

- 4) If responder has a poor holding in the help-suit, but is in the middle of the promised range, responder can make a counter help-suit game-try. For example, if hearts are agreed and opener bids 3♣, help-suit, if responder has the middle of the range, a poor holding in clubs, and Kxx of diamonds, responder can make a counter help-suit game-try bid of 3♦. Opener with a good diamond fragment will bid game, but with a poor diamond holding, will simply rebid 3♥.

Note #1: Some people and books play help-suit game tries differently. They play that the **ONLY** criteria to decide to bid game or not is the cards in the help-suit. You should discuss this with your partner and make sure you're both on the same wavelength. I recommend the "tie-breaking" approach described above.

Note #2: if opener just rebids the trump suit at the 3 level, this is **NOT** a game-try – it's a "blocking bid" (also called 1-2-3 STOP) intended to keep the opponents out of the auction. Opener **COULD** have made a help-suit game-try and didn't, so he's **NOT** trying for game. Again, some partnerships play a 3-bid of the trump suit as a game-try asking responder about the "quality" of responder's trump support. Discuss this with your partner. I play 1-2-3 stop.

Note #3: A help-suit game-try **MAY** be a help-suit **slam-try**. In this case, if responder declines, opener just bids game.

Note #4: Sometimes a game-try isn't really a help-suit. Example: Say partner opens 1 heart and responder bids 3♣, Bergen. The **ONLY** game-try opener has is 3♦. Since this is a forced bid (termed "Last Train"), responder should not really look at his diamonds but rather just at whether he's a minimum or maximum.