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This Week in Bridge

(108) Kokish Game Tries

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Level: 5

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General

When we find a Major suit fit and we are interested in game (specifically in the auction 1M – 2M), we want to have a good way to explore or invite game. The traditional way to do this is to ask for help in a side suit, using a Help Suit Game Try, HSGT. We additionally have 2NT available to make a general try for game (some play it as trump suit GT) and a raise to 3-Major to mean 1-2-3 Stop (or generally quantitative/general GT.) This structure is reasonably effective in exploring game. But it has two significant downsides:

- Both players must guess about wasted values (points opposite shortness), and
- Declarer has to describe their hand (HSGT side suit), helping the opponents defend the hand.

Kokish Game Tries are an upgrade to HSGT that give up very little and allow us to overcome the problems with HSGT. Let's see how these work.

Kokish Game Tries (Two-Way Game Tries)

Kokish Game Tries combine HSGT and short-suit game tries. Let's start by looking at the meaning of each bid in the two Major suit auctions we will focus on:

Auctions

1♠ 2♠

—?

- 2NT* Asks for where partner will accept a HSGT.
- 3♣/♦/♥* Short Suit GT – S/V in the suit bid.
- 3♠* 1-2-3 Stop (or Quantitative or Trump Suit GT) – Partnership Choice.

1♥ 2♥

—?

- 2♠* Asks for where partner will accept a HSGT.
- 2NT* Short Suit GT in ♠ – ♠ -- NT Replacement.

- 3♣/♦* Short Suit GT – S/V in the suit bid.
- 3♥* 1-2-3 Stop (or Quantitative or Trump Suit GT) – Partnership Choice.

Short Suit Game Try

The Short Suit Game Tries are the simplest to understand. Opener is showing game interest opposite a simple raise and shortness in the suit bid. Responder then can evaluate if they have wasted values (honors in that suit) or if their values fit well because they are in the other 3-suits.

Note: We will use the cheapest bid as our “Where would you accept HSGT?” We need all the space for that bidding. Thus, after 1♥ - 2♥ we will use 2♠ as an ask and 2NT* as a short suit GT in ♠ (singleton or void in ♠.)*

Help Suit Game Try Ask

Instead of the Opener showing where they need help, we can potentially conceal some information by having Responder (the future dummy) show where they would accept a Game Try. Let’s look at the details of how this Ask and the follow-up bids work:

- 1♠ 2♠
2NT* __? Game Try Ask
- 3♣ Accepts a ♣ GT
 - After 3♣ then 3♦ asks “Do you accept a ♦ GT?”
 - 3♥ = I do not accept in ♦ but I do in ♥.
 - 3♠ = I do not accept in either ♦ or ♥.
 - Other bids accept in ♦ (most commonly bidding game, 4♠!)
 - After 3♣ then 3♥ asks “Do you accept a ♥ GT?”
 - 3♠ = I do not accept in ♥.
 - Other bids accept in ♥ (most commonly bidding Game, 4♠!)
 - 3♦ Accepts a ♦ GT (not a ♣ GT)
 - After 3♦ then 3♥ asks “Do you accept a ♥ GT?”
 - 3♠ = No.
 - Other bids accept in ♥ (most commonly 4♠!)
 - 3♥ Accepts a ♥ GT (not a ♣ or ♦ GT)
 - 3♠ Accepts no GT.
 - 4♠ Accepts all GT.

Note: Other bids above 3♠ are splinters accepting the GT!



- 1♥ 2♥
- 2♠* __? Game Try Ask
- 2NT* Accepts a ♠ GT
 - After 2NT* then 3♣ asks “Do you accept a ♣ GT?”
 - 3♦ = I do not accept in ♣ but I do in ♦.
 - 3♥ = I do not accept in either ♣ or ♦.
 - Other bids accept in ♣ (most commonly bidding Game, 4♥!)
 - After 2NT* then 3♦ asks “Do you accept a ♦ GT?”
 - 3♥ = I do not accept in ♦.
 - Other bids accept in ♦ (most commonly bidding Game, 4♥!)
 - 3♣ Accepts a ♣ GT (not a ♠ GT)
 - After 3♣ then 3♦ asks “Do you accept a ♦ GT?”
 - 3♥ = I do not accept in ♦.
 - Other bids accept in ♦ (most commonly bidding Game, 4♥!)
 - 3♦ Accepts a ♦ GT (not a ♠ or ♣ GT)
 - 3♥ Accepts no GT.
 - 4♥ Accepts all GT.

Note: Other bids above 3♥ are splinters accepting the GT!

We can see Opener starts the ask with the relay (cheapest bid). Responder then bids up the line where they would accept – bidding 3M if none, 4M if all. After Responder’s first answer, if Opener wants to know about help in an undiscussed higher suit, they can bid a suit to ask about help in that suit. Responder can again bid game 4M if they have help, bid 3M if no help in that or any other suit, or bid a new side suit below 3M (if there is room) to show no help in the ask suit but help in this final suit.

Note: This sounds more complicated than it actually is at the table – with a little practice you will quickly get the hang of it!

By using this repeated game try structure, Opener/Declarer does not reveal as much information about their hand and Opener discovers where Responder can help with their losers – with either honors or shortness.

Note: Just as HSGT can be used by the Opener to explore slam, so can Kokish GT.

Other Kokish GT Auctions

Most partnerships also use GT (either HSGT or Kokish) in overcall auctions:

Example

1♦ 1♠ P 2♠
P 3♣*

If your partnership finds these Kokish GT useful then you can explore expanding them to other auctions such as this overcall and raise.

Conclusion

Kokish Game Tries are an excellent upgrade to traditional HSGT. They allow for hand re-evaluation given short suit information and for Responder to show where they would accept HSGT through the asking relay. There are a few complexities and tricky parts to remember with these methods, but having a good way to communicate with partner to get their input is worth the challenge. If you have a regular partner, sit down and practice Kokish GT together, then give them a try at the table!