

## Newer Players

## Ask Jerry



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**Dear Jerry,**  
**My partner and I seek arbitration.**  
**On what type of holdings should we make help-suit game tries?**  
**One of us thinks it shows something like: x-x-x, while the other feels it shows some strength in the suit.**

Steve

Hi Steve,  
It's been a little over 11 years since I have addressed this issue in one of my columns. Thanks for asking me to do it again! Not surprisingly, I have a very strong opinion.

Years ago, two of my friends who I had always considered as competent bridge players expressed an opinion that they would make help-suit game tries on holdings like x-x-x, looking for "help" in that suit for potential games. *What?!* Exactly what type of help would you hope for opposite this holding? Would K-x-x be enough? Methinks not since you have three potential losers in this suit. Would responder need two of the top three honors to call it help? If this method is played by a partnership, I think it should be Alerted as "weak-suit game tries."

The reality is, tricks come from high cards working together more so than when they are scattered about. Think about the following hand:

♠ 8 2 ♥ A K J 6 4 ♦ 2 ♣ A Q 8 4 3.

After opening 1♥, and hearing partner make a simple raise to 2♥, there are several ways to proceed.

- 1) Pass. Too conservative.
- 2) 4♥. Perhaps a bit optimistic.
- 3) 3♥. Asking partner to continue with a maximum, and pass with a minimum.

4) Make a help-suit game try.  
I reject options 1, 2 and 3. The problem with the first two is they're unilateral. The problem with No. 3 is that the information you ask for may be irrelevant to your needs! Suppose you bid 3♥ and partner holds:

♠ Q J 5 ♥ Q 10 5 ♦ K Q 7 4 ♣ 7 6 2.

With his full 10-count, he would clearly accept your game try. How do you think 4♥ rates to fare? It appears we have two clear spade losers, a certain diamond, and if the club finesse works, only one club loser. Not a very good heart game. How about 3NT? Well ... if spades are 4-4, and the club finesse works, nine tricks are likely. Still not a good game. Now for a moment pretend responder held the following:

♠ 9 6 5 ♥ 8 7 5 ♦ 9 8 7 4 ♣ K 6 2.

Just 3 HCP, and 4♥ game is possible! All you need is to pick up hearts for no losers, and find clubs 3-2. Not a great game, but far superior to game opposite the previous 10 HCP hand which had zero play, and no, I would not expect anyone to either respond on this hand, or actually ever reach a game – just an illustration.

The reason? The ♣K in responder's hand on the second example is more valuable to opener than the combination of the ♠QJ, and the ♦KQ.

When I make a help-suit game try, I am asking responder to focus on his holding in the suit that I am now bidding. Typical holdings for making a HSGT might be: A-Q-x-(x), K-J-x-(x), A-J-x-(x). If his raise contains either the ace or king of my "try," raise me to game in our suit. If he holds as little as Q-x-x, or J-10-9, he should look at the rest of his hand and at least consider

bidding game. With holdings like x-x-x, he should in most cases simply reject my try and return to the three level.

There are times where responder might reject my try, but make one of his own. After:

1♠	2♠
3♣	?

Holding:

♠ A 5 2 ♥ 8 3 2 ♦ K J 10 6 5 ♣ 6 3,

I think responder should try 3♦ over 3♣, rejecting the club try, but suggesting game possibilities if opener also held a diamond honor or honors.

Just another situation where what *we* hold is more important than what either of us holds independently. ☺

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