



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

www.jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

My partner and I have a difference of opinion on help suit game tries (HSGT) and apparently, so do a lot of experienced players in our area. Your view would be appreciated.

Aidan

Hi Aidan,

I understand the source of your confusion. Many years ago, a friend of mine expressed his idea that a HSGT would be based on a holding such as x-x-x. In my not-so-humble opinion, this may be one of the worst possible holdings to ask for help. Let's digress.

More tricks are created when high cards are working together rather than when scattered about independently. When partner knows what I have, and can remember what he has, he is better positioned to know what we have. Consider the following hand as dealer:

♠8 5 ♥A K J 6 4 ♦9 ♣A Q 7 4 2.

After opening 1♥, and hearing partner make a normal, simple raise (2♥), you have several ways to react.

1. With a great 14 HCP, four quick tricks, two five-card suits, a singleton and a doubleton, you could blast to game.
2. With only 14 HCP opposite at most a bad 10 points, you could simply

pass and play part score.

3. You could take a middle position by making another bid to allow responder to make the "last mistake."

I prefer to reject the first two options, but if forced to choose between bidding game or passing 2♥, I would bid a game.

Choosing the third option seems clear, provided you have good methods. If you simply re-raise 2♥ to 3♥ and responder holds:

♠Q J 6 ♥Q 9 8 3 ♦K J 5 ♣8 6 5,

responder, with 9 HCP, would clearly accept your game invitation. How would that work out for you? Two certain spade losers, one certain diamond loser and at least one club loser, and two if the finesse does not work. Not too good, despite responder holding a maximum with four-card support.

For just a moment, use your imagination and view the following as it is intended: an example, not the real world! You open 1♥ then excuse yourself to visit the restroom. You rejoin the table and partner announces the contract is 4♥. Consider your chances with this hand as dummy:

♠9 7 2 ♥10 5 3 2 ♦7 6 5 ♣K 8 3.

You have two spades and one diamond to lose for sure. If trumps break 2-2, or the queen is singleton in either hand, or if you peer into your RHO's hand and finesse against Q-x-x (just kidding about the peek!), you expect to lose three tricks and win 10 tricks. This 3-point dummy provides an excellent chance of making game while the previous 9-point dummy offered no chance. The difference between

these two hands is that the ♣K in the second example is worth more than the combined ♠Q J and ♦K J in the first.

The best auction would find opener making a 3♣ help suit game try. The message sent is that what matters is not how many points responder holds, but rather where they are located.

Say responder holds:

♠J 7 6 ♥Q 10 5 3 ♦7 6 5 ♣K J 3.

The auction should go 1♥ by opener, 2♥ by responder, 3♣ (game try) by opener, 4♥ by responder.

After 1♥-2♥, any new suit by opener should not be construed as an attempt to make that suit trump, but merely to express interest in game or even slam possibilities and suggest that values held by responder in the new suit should be weighted more heavily than outside high-card points. With either the ace or king of the new suit, almost always accept the try and bid game. With the Q-x-(x-x), think positive thoughts, but consider the rest of your hand before deciding. With x-x-x, a rejection is nearly mandatory! Shortness, *i.e.*, a singleton or a void, held by responder in the "help" suit is valuable only if you hold four-card or longer trump support. Sometimes those pesky opponents lead trumps and make it difficult for partner to ruff losers in his help suit.

Any holding where a high honor in responder's hand would be valuable is acceptable for a HSGT. Holdings include, but are not limited to A-Q-x-x-(x), K-J-x-x-(x) or A-J-x-x-(x). If responder holds the other high honor opposite these holdings, you have tricks. □