

Nice and peaceful last week? I guess not. But the troublemaker who has been mentioned in the last three issues (Thorlief) will no longer be playing. Enough said, lets get onto some serious stuff – Bridge.

Game Tries and all that Jazz

I shall cover just one general topic this week - an area where many players have difficulty: – cue bids, game tries, NT probes (both showing a stop and asking), 4th suit forcing and splinters. Quite a lot of stuff here, but they are sort of inter-twined and I will attempt to unravel them.

- a) The Game Try. Generally used only when a major suit has been agreed at the two level. It is a bid which asks partner to go to 4 of the major with a suitable hand.
- b) The NT probe. Generally used when a minor suit has been agreed. A bid of a new suit shows a stop in the suit and asks partner to bid a stop of his own in search of 3NT.
- c) The NT (or stopper ask) ask. When 3 suits have been bid naturally, a bid of the 4th suit is conventional, asking partner to clarify his hand. A NT bid directly after partner has bid the 4th suit shows a stopper in the 4th suit (this is the method adopted by just about everybody except Chuck). Without a stopper, you cannot bid NT.

A fairly similar situation is when you bid a suit which the opponents have bid. Again, you may well be looking for NT and partner must obviously have something in the suit to bid NT. Opinion is divided here. Some people (e.g Hans) insist that the situation is exactly the same as 4th suit, and that a NT bid must be a real stopper. Others employ this bid (the Directional Asking Bid, or DAB) when they have a half stopper themselves and just need a little help. This is the approach adopted by myself and Paul. I guess you need to discuss it with your partner. I personally feel that there are few occasions when you would want to ask partner for a stop if you yourself have nothing in a suit that the opponents have bid. With a double stop, partner will bid NT himself and so I feel that the DAB approach (promising a little something, and enabling partner to bid NT on as little as J9x or Qx) is to be preferred.

- d) The Cue bid. This is a bid in a new suit (when a fit has been established) at a level which commits the partnership to game. It generally shows the ace and invites partner to cue bid in search of slam.
- e) The Splinter. Usually after a major suit has been bid by partner. An unnecessary jump (one level above a forcing bid) is a splinter. It agrees partner's last bid suit as trumps and shows shortage (singleton or void) in the suit bid.

Obviously we need a few examples: -

- 1 ♠ - 2 ♠ - 3 ♦ This is not a cue bid or a NT probe. It is a game try. Of course, if opener subsequently bid on over game, then it was a cue bid.
- 1 ♠ - 2 ♠ - 3 ♥ This is not a cue bid. It is normally interpreted as a game try but often with a 4 (possibly 5) card ♥ suit (responder may just have 4 or more ♥'s and ♥'s may be a better strain. Anyway, it is a game try and not a NT probe or cue bid.
- 1 ♠ - 3 ♠ - 4 ♦ This is a cue bid. The bid commits the partnership to game. If opener was not interested in slam, he would simply bid 4 ♠.
- 1 ♠ - 2 ♠ - 4 ♦ This is a splinter, either singleton or void.
- 1 ♠ - 2 ♥ - 4 ♦ This is a splinter, either singleton or void. It agrees partner's ♥ suit as trumps.
- 1 ♥ - 2 ♥ - 2 ♠ This is a game try. It is not a NT probe or a cue bid.
- 1 ♥ - 2 ♥ - 3 ♠ This is a splinter, either singleton or void.
- 1 ♣ - 2 ♣ - 2 ♥ This is showing a stopper with 3NT in mind. It is not a suggestion to play in ♥'s.
- 1 ♣ - 3 ♣ - 3 ♥ Again showing a stopper with 3NT in mind.

In these last two examples, if partner does indeed bid 3NT and you bid on, then the bid was a cue bid. Things are much the same when responder makes a bid after opener's 2nd bid: -

- 1 ♣ - 1 ♠ - 3 ♠ - 4 ♦ This is a cue bid. It commits the partnership to game.
- 1 ♣ - 1 ♠ - 2 ♠ - 3 ♦ This is a game try. We could stop in 3 ♠.
- 1 ♣ - 1 ♠ - 2 ♠ - 4 ♦ This is a splinter, either singleton or void.
- 1 ♣ - 1 ♥ - 1 ♠ - 3 ♦ This is a splinter, either singleton or void. It agrees ♠'s as trumps.
- 1 ♣ - 1 ♥ - 1 ♠ - 2 ♦ This is 4th suit forcing. A NT bid now by opener shows a ♦ stop.

Anyway, the reason I am mentioning all of this is because a hand came up last week where knowledge of game tries would have got to the correct contract. Before I get onto the

- actual hand, consider this one. You open 1 ♥ and get a 2 ♥ response (6-9 pts). Obviously you have a good hand, but to jump to 4 ♥ really would be too optimistic. So you invite game. Traditionally, 3 ♥ is the bid.
- ♠ A842
- ♥ AQ974
- ♦ 76
- ♣ AK
- But if you play (help suit) game tries, then bid 2 ♠. It says 'please bid game if you can help me in ♠'s'. So, that is the general concept of the help suit game try, we need help in the suit bid. The ace, king or often queen are enough. With adequate trump support, even a small doubleton is good. Got the general idea? Use the game try to establish if partner can help in a specific suit.

Now let's get on to Hand 16 from last week. First of all, what do you open?

♠ A842 A nice hand with 21 points. 2NT (20-22) is a reasonable bid, but I do not
♥ AQ974 like it for two reasons. Firstly the hand is not balanced and secondly
♦ A because the ♥ suit is quite respectable. So how about a strong 2♥? Even if
♣ AK9 you play strong twos (either directly or Benjamin), this hand does not
qualify. The ♥ suit is not good enough and the hand has insufficient
playing strength. That just leaves 1♥ as the only acceptable opening bid. Now some people may cry out
'but it may be passed out!' True, but if partner cannot respond, I would certainly prefer to play the hand in
1♥ rather than 2NT! So, we open a heavyweight 1♥ and partner responds 2♥, what now? Partner's
support has improved our already powerful hand, and we are (at least I am) certainly looking for slam.

Remember last week when I said that you should not even try for slam on that flat combined 32 count?
The situation here is completely different. We are *not* flat and we *have a fit*. And remember what I said
about re-evaluation. This hand can only open 1♥; but once partner supports, it becomes enormous.

A bid of 4♥ now would show a relatively balanced 19 count. We are too strong. A cue bid or a
splinter is pointless, as partner has nothing to cue in return! Standard Blackwood is useless, we have all
the aces and if we ask for kings we have no idea if partner has the useful ♠K or the 'less useful' ♦K. We
could use Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB) to establish that partner has the ♥K, but that does not
really help, we need to know about his ♠ holding. Having used RKCB, there are methods to ask for a
specific king, but that will get us too high – they are designed for situations when looking for the grand. So
none of the slam conventions help. How do we find out if partner has help in ♠'s?

Simple. We just use a game try! After 1♥ - 2♥, we bid 2♠; a game try, asking for help in ♠'s. Now
partner will think that we are just trying for game, but that does not matter (we are the Captain, he is the
crew). If he signs off in 3♥, then we simply bid 4♥. But if he accepts the 'game try' then we use RKCB
to check that he has the king of trumps and bid 6♥ (or you could just bid 6♥ anyway). What happened in
real life last week? Partner had an eight count including the ♥K and ♠K (doubleton) and would (should)
certainly accept a game try. The hand was played 5 times. 13 tricks were made twice and 12 on the other
3 occasions. Unfortunately, nobody bid slam. It does not come up that often, but game tries can be used
when looking for slam.