

## The Help-Suit Game Try

West                      Suppose that you hold this West hand and you obviously open 1♠. Partner supports with 2♠, what do you do? Clearly you want to invite game and the traditional bid would be 3♠. But these days there is a better method - the help-suit game try. With this hand you really need something in ♦'s from partner to make game and so we have the help-suit game try. When a major suit has been agreed at the two level, then a bid of a new suit asks partner to bid game (or else cue bid) if he can help in that suit.

♠ KQ10854  
♥ KQ9  
♦ A82  
♣ 6

An excellent 4♠ game was reached at the local (Pattaya) club on this deal with minimal values (20 points): -

West	East	West	East
♠ KQ10854	♠ 9762	1♠	2♠
♥ KQ9	♥ 107	3♦ (1)	4♠ (2)
♦ A82	♦ KQJ4	pass	
♣ 6	♣ 743		

West obviously opens 1♠ and East's 2♠ response (6-9 pts) is equally obvious.

- (1) Now West wants to invite game (4♠) and the traditional method is to bid 3♠, invitational. But help-suit game tries are much more effective and a bid of 3♦ here asks partner to bid game (4♠) if he can help in the ♦ suit.
- (2) This East hand is minimum (just 6 points) but that is not important. The important factors are 4 card ♠ support and excellent ♦'s. Partner has asked for ♦ help and you have two important cards (three even) for him – so that's enough to go to game.

Note that without the help-suit game try, West would bid 3♠ and East would obviously pass with his minimum. 4♠ made easily with this well fitting 20 count.

There is just one exception when responder should not necessarily simply leap off to game with good support for the help-suit, when the bidding starts 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♥: -

West	East	West	East
♠ KQJ85	♠ 976	1♠	2♠
♥ KQ97	♥ AJ64	3♥ (1)	4♥ (2)
♦ A82	♦ K43	pass	
♣ 6	♣ 874		

Here we have a 4-4 ♥ fit, and a 4-4 fit is usually superior to a 5-3 fit. So East bids 4♥ at (2) just in case West has 4 ♥'s (the 3♥ bid at (1) is a help-suit game try and may or may not be a 4 card suit). In this particular case a 4-4 ♥ fit is located and the best game is bid. Note that East's 4♥ bid is natural and so if he holds less ♥'s including the ♥A he should not cue bid it.

Now I am going to expand on this Help Suit Game Try theory because a hand came up at the club where knowledge of game tries would have got to the correct contract. Before I get onto the actual hand, consider another typical HSGT. 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. 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.

### **Help Suit Game Try as a Slam Try!**

Now let’s get on to the actual hand from the club. 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 like it for two reasons. Firstly the hand is not balanced and secondly because the ♥ suit is quite respectable. So how about a strong 2♥? Even if 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.

I have frequently said in the news-sheets that you should not even try for slam on a flat combined 32 count. The situation here is completely different. We are *not* flat and we *have a fit*. And remember what I have 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 at the club? 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.