

Game Tries, cue bids, splinters, 4th suit forcing and all that Jazz

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This is 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 in a methodical and logical way (my middle name is Spok): -

- 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). 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 opposite partner's cue 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, Chuck 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.
- f) 4th Suit Forcing. A bid of the 4th suit is often artificial. It is fully explained in the document on 4th suit forcing.

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 bids 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. For example: -

- 1♣ - 3♣ - 3♥ - 3NT - 4♣ Opener has removed 3NT into 4♣. This is not because he does not like NT, but because he is now slamming! This 4♣ bid is natural and sets trumps (but see notes (a) and (b) below). A 4♦/♥/♠ bid by responder would now be a cue bid. Continuing this theme: -

1♣ - 3♣ - 3♥ - 3NT - 4NT

- 1♣ - 3♣ - 3♥ - 3NT - 5♣ Gerber. If opener wished to ask for aces (a natural 4♣ bid would normally be a better bid) then Gerber after partner's 3NT is always a jump in ♣'s, so 5♣ here. But there are a couple of better options here: -

- 1- If you play Kickback then 4♦ would be RKCB with ♣'s as trumps and 4♣ would be natural and starting a cue bidding sequence.
 - 2- Some players, who do not play Kickback but realise the disadvantages of 4NT (or a higher bids!) as ace asking with a minor suit as trumps, play 4 of an agreed minor as RKCB – this is also an excellent scheme, so 4♣ here would then be RKCB and 4♦ a cue bid.
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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. Note that 2♦ here would not be natural but 4th suit forcing. Nether the less it is best to play 3♦ as a splinter as a natural ♦ bid is hardly needed in this sequence.
 - 1♣ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♦ This is 4th suit forcing. A NT bid now by opener shows a ♦ stop.
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For more about Help Suit Game Tries, refer to that document.

For more about 4th Suit Forcing, refer to that document.

For more about Splinters, refer to that document.

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