

# Bidding Matters



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## The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders

### 9. They analyze the auction from partner's point of view (cont.)

In the last issue, we looked at a situation where you had to realize that partner couldn't provide the information you needed to make a decision about the final contract. Is this another?

Partner	You
1♦	1♥
2♥	?

Both sides vulnerable, what's your call holding:

♠A K Q ♥J 10 9 8 ♦4 ♣8 7 6 5 4?

Even with just 10 high-card points, a seven-loser hand is usually worth an invitation in this auction. Your decision will depend on how concerned you are about the topless trumps and singleton in partner's suit. At matchpoints, these shortcomings will probably convince most of the field to pass 2♥, so it may be wise to do the same and keep your plus score.

At IMPs, the scoring odds favor bidding vulnerable games that are 40 percent or better, and that's excuse enough to move with this hand. The

challenge is how to involve partner in the decision. A help-suit game try is a common solution, but if you consider the holdings that will prompt partner to accept or reject your try, you'll conclude that this is a tougher problem than it first appeared.

It's important to remember that a help-suit try is a question. Its main purpose is not to show the location of your values, but to ask partner where his are. It's a question you'll want to ask only if you believe partner can give you a reliable answer.

A typical holding for a help-suit bid is K-x-x or A-J-x-x, and partner will usually bid game if he has a high honor in your suit. With the previous hand, a 2♠ bid is obviously pointless, as you don't need spade help and you already know partner doesn't have it.

A 3♣ try has the opposite problem — you need too much help. Partner will think his K-J-3 or Q-10 are good fillers, but neither holding will provide sure tricks.

Another possible advance is 2NT. That suggests a more balanced hand (and depending on your agreements, it may be passable), but at least it gets partner to evaluate his overall strength. This may not be an accurate predictor of game chances, either, as some 12-point openers will give you a good play for 4♥, and some 14-counts offer no hope at all.

Once you accept that no in-between bid will elicit an informed decision from partner, you're left with two choices: pass or bid 4♥. There's an old joke that the most successful game-try strategy is to just bid the game and try to make it. If you play

sound openers, a jump to 4♥ is a reasonable guess, especially at IMPs. If not — or if partner is a big fan of three-card raises — pass may be a better choice.

Game-try bids can be even more futile with very distributional hands. Suppose you open 1♠ and partner raises to 2♠. What's your call holding:  
♠Q 9 8 7 4 3 2 ♥— ♦K Q 10 2 ♣A 4?

The diamonds have the right honor structure for a help-suit try of 3♦, but is this the right hand for that bid?

Try constructing some possible responding hands and imagine partner's thought process after you bid 3♦. Unless he has a maximum with other assets, the ♦A is the only card that will convince him to accept your invitation. He won't guess that his ♦J is so valuable with a sub-minimum such as:

♠J 6 5 ♥9 8 7 6 ♦J 4 3 ♣K 5 3.

(Your suit could be ♦A 8 5 or ♦K 9 7 6). He'll fear that his club honors may not be working if he holds:

♠10 6 5 ♥9 8 7 6 2 ♦5 3 ♣K Q 6.

Another question to ask yourself: If you bid 3♦ and partner retreats to 3♠, are you really going to pass? Partners tend to get annoyed when you ask their opinion and then ignore it. If you're going to bid game anyway, there's no point in telling partner — and the opponents — about your side suit. Your 7-4 distribution is so powerful that 4♠ has to be a good gamble, so skip the "practice game try" and get there quickly. □