

BIDDING: PART SCORE OR GAME?

Often, we're trying to decide whether to bid a game or sign off in part score.

One way to decide this is with invitational bids like 1NT-2NT or a limit raise. Invitational bids ALWAYS mean, "Partner, if you have the minimum of the range you've promised, it's not enough and we need to be playing in part score, but if you're at your top end, please take us to game."

1♣-1♠-3♠ says this. 1♦-1♥-2NT says this. Responder has shown 6-9/10 points and opener has shown more than a minimum opener.

There are a few other bids that also try to solve this problem - part score or game?

Limit raises

Limit raises are bids that show support for partner's suit and about 10-12 points.

A typical hand might be ♠Axx-♥KJx-♦Qxxxx-♣xx. (partner has opened 1♥ or 1♠)

In Standard American, this used to be shown by a jump to the 3-level in partner's suit. Thus, if partner opened 1♥ or 1♠, we would bid 3♥ or 3♠ with that hand (1M-3M).

If we play the Forcing 1NT convention, with 3-cards support, we bid 1NT first before bidding 3M: 1♥-1NT-2♣-3♥ or 1♠-1NT-2♠-3♠.

If we play Bergen, with 4-card support we bid 3♦ to show this hand (or 3♣ if we play inverted or reverse Bergen): 1♠-3m.

If we are a passed hand and partner opens 1M in 3rd or 4th seat, we show this hand using the Drury convention: p-(p)-1♠-(p)-2♣!

If the opponents overcall (non-jump) in a suit, we cuebid their suit to show a limit raise or better: 1♠-(2♦)-3♦ or 1♥-(1♠)-2♠.

If the opponents make a takeout double, 2NT (called the Jordan 2NT) shows a limit raise or better: 1♥-(x)-2NT.

If partner has overcalled, we make a 2-level cuebid of the opponent's (first) suit to show a limit raise or better: (1♣)-1♥-(1♠, 1NT, or pass)-2♣.

If partner has opened in a minor, we show support in this range with a raise of the minor to the 3-level (1♣-3♣), or, if we play inverted minors, to the 2-level (1♦-2♦).

Game tries

Although every invitational bid is an investigation into the possibility of game, the ones called game tries are of a specific form. Auctions that include 1M-2M can lead to what is called a game try. 1M-2M can be preceded by 1m as with 1m-1M-2M or 1♣-1♥-2♥-1M-2M.

They come in three flavors: help suit game tries (HGSTs), short suit game tries (SSGTs), and Kokish game tries, or what I like to call what suit game tries (WSGTs).

HSGTs ask partner if s/he can limit losers in the help suit to no more than 1 or 2, as when holding a singleton or KJx.

SSGTs attempt to identify wastage

WSGTs ask which is the lowest ranking side suit partner can limit losers in.

Maximal doubles are invitations to game in auctions where both members of the two pairs are bidding touching suits and the two suits include hearts and either diamonds or spades:

1♥-(1♠)-2♥-(2♠)-x
1♠-(2♥)-2♠-(3♥)-x
1♥-(2♦)-2♥-(3♦)-x
(1♦)-1♥-(2♦)-2♥-(3♦)-x
(1♥)-1♠-(2♥)-2♠-(3♥)-x

In each case, rebidding your side's major is merely competitive, not invitational, and should be passed. To invite, double instead.

Here's a hand from Feb 14, 2025: (p)-p-(1♥)-1♠; (2♥)-2♠-?

Mini-splinters

These bids invite game in partner's major by jumping in a red gap suit in which one has shortness.

With ♠KJT4-♥AQ9-♦832-♣AK3, if you open 1♣ and partner responds 1♠, you invite game by jumping to 3♠

But if your hand were ♠KJT4-♥AQ93-♦3-♣A832, why not make a mini-splinter and invite to invite game AND show diamond shortness to let partner decide whether wastage is a problem this time or not?

